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WILD WEST WEEKLY.

YOUNG WILD WEST CAUGHT BY COMANCHES

By AN OLD SCOUT.



Heedless of the fact that the Comanches stood ready to let their arrow fly at her, Arietta bounded forward, knife in hand. "I'll save you. Wild!" she cried.

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WILD WEST WEEKLY

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Young Wild West Caught by Comanches

OR,

ARIETTA DARING DEATH

By AN OLD SCOUT

CHAPTER I.

TEXAS JAKE'S STORY.

"Wild, I was listenin' ter a story an old hunter was tellin' in ther barroom a little while ago, an' blamed if I didn't git a whole lot interested," said Cheyenne Charlie, the well-known scout and Indian fighter, as he joined Young Wild West on the porch of the tavern in the little village of Clayton, New Mexico, a few minutes before noon, on a bright day in Autumn, a few years ago.

"Is that so, Charlie?" the dashing young deadshot answered, as he threw down the paper he had been reading. "What was the story?"

"Well, ther old feller was sayin' as how he had found a lot of Comanche Injuns livin' back in ther mountains jest ther same as redskins lived a hundred years ago. This gang ain't got anything in ther line of a gun or rifle; they jest use bows an' arrows, spears an' tomahawks an' sich-like. They don't like ther whites, either; but they don't chase 'em very far, when they find they're willin' ter leave that neighborhood. I got putty well interested, 'cause I was satisfied that ther man wasn't lyin' altogether. Accordin' ter what he says, there's about four or five hundred of ther redskins. They've got a village of ther own, an' ther huntin' grounds is full of all kinds of game. He says he had a little trouble with 'em, but managed ter git away after he got a sting in ther arm from one of ther arrows. I seen ther wound, an' I am well satisfied it was made by an arrow, all right."

"Well, Charlie," and the boy showed no little interest, "if there is anything in what the hunter says, I reckon,

it would be a good idea for us to go and look up this tribe of Comanches. Excitement and adventure is what we are after, you know."

"That's right, Wild. I knowed you'd say that. Well, s'pose we go an' have a little talk with ther man?"

"Right away. If I think there is anything in the story we'll strike out to-morrow morning."

Right here we might as well state that Young Wild West, though but a boy in years, was without doubt the greatest of all the heroes of the Wild West at the time of which we write, which was a few years ago when conditions were far more wild and dangerous than they are now.

When but sixteen years of age he had defeated the best shots to be found in all Wyoming in a shooting contest, and had been declared the Champion Deadshot of the West.

Since that time he had held the title against all comers, for he practiced daily, and had become so experienced with both a rifle and revolver that he never pulled a trigger without hitting the mark he aimed at.

But probably what made him famous was his remarkable coolness under any and all conditions, and his ability to do the right thing at the right time.

Handsome, strong and as brave as could be, it was no wonder that the dashing young deadshot had made a name for himself.

The boy had struck it rich in the Black Hills two or three years prior to the opening of our story, and since that time he had been traveling about the wildest parts of the West in search of adventure, fun and fortune, and adding not only to his wealth, but also to his fame.

He always wore a fancy hunting suit of buckskin, trimmed elaborately with scarlet silk fringe, and with his long, light hair hanging over his shoulders, topped off with a broad-brimmed sombrero, he certainly made a picture that was dashing in the extreme.

Such a boy might be emulated by the boys throughout our great land, for he had never tasted anything in the way of strong drink, always fought for the right, and would not permit himself to do anything that was wrong, if he was aware of it; using his endeavors to help along the movement toward civilization in those parts where it had not yet reached.

Of course, the dashing young deadshot made enemies, as well as friends; that was to be expected.

With the assistance of his two partners he had broken up more than one gang of outlaws and road agents, and his remarkable skill at trailing and hunting down lawless bands of redskins was known far and near.

Cheyenne Charlie, who had put in a few years in the service of the government as a scout, was proud to call the boy his leader, for it happened that he did not possess the qualities of coolness and judgment that Wild, as the boy was called by his friends, did.

The scout was certainly a picturesque personage, and looked to be just what he was—a typical Westerner.

His long, black hair and mustache of the same hue, and his tanned and weather-beaten face showed plainly to that effect.

He was a tall man, too, and as straight as an arrow, and he could shoot with unerring aim, though he did not class himself with Young Wild West, when it came to either accurate or quick shooting.

As Young Wild West declared that if he found anything in the story the scout had heard the old hunter tell about the tribe of Comanches back in the mountains, that convinced him of its truthfulness, they would strike out the next morning for the place they were supposed to be located at, Jim Dart, a boy about the same age as he, came out upon the porch.

He, as well as the scout, was attired in a costume similar to that worn by the dashing young deadshot; but as the two were known as Young Wild West's partners, there was nothing strange about this.

"Well, Jim," said Wild, nodding to the boy, "I reckon there is something on hand for us. You were remarking this morning at breakfast that it was beginning to get rather dull, so, if what Charlie has heard is correct, I reckon there will be something lively for us before many days."

"Is that so?" and Dart's eyes lighted up.

Though he never had very much to say, he was one of the kind who act when it is necessary, and who are always ready to do their part.

"Yes, Jim," spoke up the scout, giving a nod. "I was just tellin' Wild what I heard an old hunter talkin' about in ther barroom of ther hotel. Accordin' to what he says, there's a band of real old-fashioned Comanches, which numbers about four or five hundred, back in ther mountains. They ain't got anything in ther shootin' line, but uses bows an' arrows and sich-like to kill their game, an' fight them as comes to bother 'em. I told Wild I al-

lowed ther old feller wasn't lyin' altogether, so Wild says we'd better go an' have a little talk with him."

"Good!" and Jim Dart nodded his approval.

"Well, come on," said Wild, as he led the way to the door of the barroom.

As the three entered they found but four or five customers in the place.

One of them was the old hunter, and Charlie quickly pointed him out.

The old man was leaning against the bar, puffing away at a cigar, while before him was a bottle and glass.

He looked up when the three entered, and then took a very close look at our hero.

"Mornin', gents," he said. "I reckon I seen one of yer a little while ago. But I didn't see you two boys afore."

This gave Wild the opportunity to start a conversation with him, so he promptly retorted:

"Well, we're strangers in town, you know. We just got here last night and we thought we would stop over until to-morrow morning. I reckon you're a hunter?"

"That's jest what I am, young feller. I've been in ther business for nigh onto thirty years now, an' that's jest long enough to make me feel as though I ain't never goin' ter git out of it. I ain't got rich at huntin' an' trappin', but I've managed to git all I wanted to eat, an' somethin' to drink now an' then, when I strike a place where it could be had. I've jest got in from a trip to ther mountains northeast of here, an' I will say that I'm mighty glad I'm here to be able ter tell it. I've been huntin' an' trappin' around these parts for years, but blamed if I didn't have ther funniest experience this trip that I ever had afore. I seen somethin' that I never believed could be possible."

"Is that so?" our hero questioned, and then turning to the barkeeper, he added: "Let's have a cigar."

A box was brought out and the old hunter promptly took one.

"This cigar I'm smokin' now," he said, as he gave a nod, and held it out so he might look at it, "is ther first one I've had in a month. I smokes a pipe generally, but when I gits into a town a cigar goes all right for a change. I'll smoke this one you jest give me after I git my dinner."

"That's all right; smoke it whenever you feel like it. But how about this great adventure of yours in the mountains? You don't mind telling me about it, do you?"

"Sartin not. I've been tellin' it for ther last half hour, an' I reckon I can tell it ag'in, an' keep on tellin' it, though I s'pose there ain't many as will believe it. What I found up there to ther northeast, young feller, was an Indian village of ther old time kind. There's a lot of Injuns livin' up there, an' they live there jest ther same as their grandfathers did. There ain't no more civilization ter 'em than there is to a grizzly bear. I don't mean to say that they're very savage, an' that they're lookin' for scalps all ther time, 'cause that ain't so. They seem ter want to keep to themselves, an' if anyone happens around there they jest run them away. I got a little too close to 'em, 'cause when I found there was somethin' like a village there I wanted to see jest what it looked like. Here's what I got for bein' inquisitive."

The old hunter showed a rather ugly-looking wound on his left forearm.

"That was done by a flint arrer head," he went on. "I was surprised by five or six of ther Comanches, an' jest 'cause I didn't start to run for my horse right away they began to shoot arrers at me to beat anything. I started to git behind a tree, so I could shoot at 'em, but when I seen they wasn't anxious to run after me, I changed my mind, an' instead of shootin', I hurried to my horse. I got on his back, an' rode away as fast as ther rough ground would let me. They yelled a little an' sent two or three arrers flyin' over my head. But I'd seen about all I wanted to see, anyhow, so I thanked my stars and lit out."

"How far away is the place where all this happened?" Wild asked, as he sized up the man and came to the conclusion that he was telling the truth.

"Jest about a hundred miles from here, as ther crow flies, I should reckon. Putty nigh due northeast, too. Maybe you know somethin' about them mountains up that way? They ain't very high ones, but they're about ther wildest ones I was ever in, an' I've been through ther Rockies somewhat in my time."

"Oh, we've seen the mountains from a distance," Wild answered; "but we never went around that way, since we thought there was nothing much to be found there that would create any excitement."

"Well, young feller, if you're lookin' for excitement, I reckon you had better strike out for that Comanche village. Ther chances is that you would git more 'an you wanted of it. But say! you don't mind tellin' me who you are, do you? You look ter be a very likely boy. I will say that I never set eyes on a young feller what struck me ther way you do."

"My name is Young Wild West."

"Git out!" exclaimed the hunter, showing great surprise. "Thunderation! I might have knowed it. I've heard of you somewhat. So you're Young Wild West, ther boy what kin shoot so straight an' kind ride any kind of a horse that was ever foaled, are yer? Well, put her there. My name is Texas Jake, leastways that's ther only handle I have had for some years back."

Our hero shook hands with the man, and then he introduced his two partners.

Those who had been in the place when they entered listened to all that was said in an interested way.

It happened that they had seen our hero and his partners before, and knew who they were, but what the old hunter had told when he arrived there a little over half an hour before, had not appeared truthful to them until now.

"So you're going to have your dinner here, are you?" said Wild, a minute or so later. "Well, I reckon we'll have a little talk with you at the table then. Probably you might take a notion to go back to this Comanche village, and if you do we should like to go with you."

Texas Jake shook his head and remained silent for a few seconds.

"Well," said he, looking up, "I did allow that I'd never go near that place again, but since you've spoke, I don't know but what I might go. If what I've heard is right I sorter reckon that I'd be putty safe with Young Wild West an' his pards. But say! I had an idee that you was a whole lot older than what yer are. You must have started in putty young, I reckon."

"Well, I started in after Indians and big game as soon as I was big enough to hold a rifle out straight," replied the young deadshot, with a smile. "I've been at it ever since, and I suppose that is why people are surprised to find that I am only a boy. I don't know what makes me do things that people talk about, though I suppose it was born in me to do what I could to help civilize the wild parts of the West. Anyhow, I like my job pretty well, and when things get too quiet I'm bound to look up something to make excitement. We'll have a little talk at the table, and I reckon you'll be willing to lead us to the Comanche village before we are done."

"I reckon so, Young Wild West. Put her there. Landlord, set up something to drink. This is goin' ter be on me. I want everybody here ter have a drink with Texas Jake, ther old hunter an' trapper what's put in years in ther wildest parts of ther mountains, but never knowed there was sich a thing as a tribe of Injuns what lived alone by themselves an' never used firearms. Set 'em up, landlord."

"Right you are, Jake," came the reply, which showed the barkeeper was not a stranger to the man. "What will it be, boys?"

All hands quickly stepped up, for the men hanging around the barroom were of the sort who like to drink. They happened to be citizens of the village who did little work and were fond of loafing and drinking.

Texas Jake had quite a sum of money with him. He had disposed of a big supply of pelts, taking half cash and half supplies for them, and he had come into the hotel "to liquor up," as he called it.

He had saved his story until he got there, and Cheyenne Charlie happened to be one of the first to hear it.

Wild took the old man by the arm after he had settled the bill at the bar.

"Texas Jake," said he, "I reckon you'll do me a favor if you don't say any more about the Comanche village you found up in the mountains. I mean not to anyone else but us. If we go there I reckon there's no need of letting everyone know our business. Just let it go as it is, will you?"

"I sartinly will, Young Wild West," was the quick reply. "You're right when yer say that there's no need of lettin' everybody know your business. I won't say another word about it—not until you ask me ter."

It was not long before the bell rang for dinner, and then our friends went into the parlor of the hotel and escorted the girls to the dining-room.

The girls, as they were always spoken of by Young Wild West and his partners, were Anna, the wife of Cheyenne Charlie; Arietta Murdock, a very pretty golden-haired miss, who was known to be the sweetheart of our hero, and Eloise Gardner, a dark-haired girl, who was the sweetheart of Jim Dart.

Of the three, Arietta was the only one who had been born and reared in the West, and she could handle a revolver or rifle, and ride a wild broncho as well as the average plainsman.

But Anna and Eloise also could shoot and ride horseback very well, and since they had been accompanying our hero and his partners in their travels in search of ad-

venture they had become accustomed to all sorts of dangers and enjoyed the open air life they were leading.

They all went to the dining-room and found Texas Jake there ahead of them.

CHAPTER II.

HOP WAH CREATES CONSIDERABLE EXCITEMENT.

There were two persons belonging to Young Wild West's party that have not been mentioned.

They were Hop Wah and Wing Wah, natives of China and typical of their race, as far as appearances went.

They were brothers, too, and looked much alike, both being very innocent and mild in manner.

Wing was the cook, and Hop was what they called their handy man.

While they had no use for any more than one servant, Hop was kept because he afforded no end of amusement while Young Wild West and his friends were in camp, and also because he had proved of the greatest value to them at different times, more than once being the direct means of saving their lives.

If anything, Hop was more innocent looking than his brother, but that is as far as it went. He really was one of the smartest Chinamen that ever came over the blue Pacific.

He was a very clever sleight-of-hand performer, a card sharp of wonderful ability, a born humorist, and liked whisky, which he always called tanglefoot.

He had his bad qualities with the good ones, which is generally the case.

His brother was a very easy-going fellow, honest and a very excellent cook, and when he had nothing to do he was inclined to doze.

The chances are that he would not have remained with our friends so long if he had not become a sort of fixture to the party.

Anyhow, Hop could not be always depended upon, especially at cooking.

Just as our hero and his partners went to the parlor to escort the girls to the dining-room, Hop Wah came into the barroom of the hotel.

He had been taking a little walk around the village, and as he came in his face was beaming and his smile was bland, indeed.

"Hello, Hop!" said the barkeeper, who evidently had met him before. "Got back, have you?"

"Lat light, so be," was the reply. "No takee long to walkee lound lis place. No velly muchee houses, so be. Me no find um Chinees in town."

"No, they ain't no heathens here, that's right," and the barkeeper grinned. "What will yer have?"

"Me likee havee lillee dlink of tanglefoot, so be."

"All right, I reckon I'll stand treat this time. Ther boss ain't around, an' if he was it wouldn't make no difference. He tells me to use my customers as I think best, an' when I think they oughter be treated I always do it in ther right shape."

Hop accepted the glass that was pushed toward him, and then as he got hold of the bottle he poured out some of the liquor.

It was just then that a half-breed Indian walked into the barroom.

He was a villainous-looking fellow, indeed, for there were several scars upon his face that showed plainly and disfigured him a whole lot.

But it was evident that he was not a stranger there, for the four loungers, who were left there when Young Wild West and his partners and the hunter went out nodded to him and accepted greetings.

"Where have yer been ther last two or three days, Rattler?" one of them asked.

"Been fishin' up ther creek," was the reply, in about the same kind of English used by the natives of that part of the country. "Had putty good luck, too. Jest sold all ther fish I had, an' now I'm goin' ter buy some liquor."

Then the half-breed walked to the bar and threw some money upon it.

"Half a gallon of liquor," he said, as he looked at the Chinaman and scowled. "I'm in a little hurry. Never mind that feller. He don't belong here, anyhow."

"Velly nicee day, so be," spoke up Hop, quickly, and then bowed low to the newcomer. "Me velly glad to meet um handsome man. You gottee velly nicee face, so be."

"What's that?" and the half-breed scowled fiercer than ever. "What do yer mean by talkin' to me like that, you heathen galoot?"

"Lat allee light," retorted the Chinaman, and he quickly pulled a cigar from his pocket and tendered it to the fellow. "You have lillee smoke, so be? Me likee you velly muchee."

The loungers grinned, for it was easy for them to guess that the Chinaman was poking fun at the half-breed, though it could not be told by the expression of his face.

Rattler, as he was called, looked at the Chinaman in silence for a minute. Then he must have concluded that what had been said to him was really meant, for he accepted the cigar, and in a gentler tone of voice, said:

"All right, heathen. I'll take ther cigar an' smoke it. But I want ter ask yer a question. Kin yer see straight?"

"Me see velly muchee stlaight," declared Hop, shaking his head decisively.

"Well, I thought maybe yer couldn't. You said I was a very handsome man, when I knows I'm about as homely a galoot as ever lived. But I can't help it, of course. I wasn't so bad lookin' afore I got inter a nest of wildcats about three years ago. They jest ripped off all ther flesh I had on me, and when it healed up I looked like this. But maybe your eyes ain't keen enough to see ther scars."

"Me allee samee tink you lookee velly nicee," and the Chinaman acted as though there could be no doubt about it. "You havee lillee dlink with me, so be?"

"Well, I don't mind if I do. I ain't never seen very many heathens, but you seem to be about ther best one I ever did strike."

A nod from Hop caused the barkeeper to put out a glass for the half-breed.

He filled it to the brim, and then raising it, nodded and said:

"Here's good luck to yer, heathen."

"Dlinkee velly muchee hardee, so be," was the retort.

Both drank, and then Hop struck a match and offered it to his new friend.

Rattler accepted it, and lighted his cigar.

"Jest hurry up with that jug of liquor, will yer?" he said, as he nodded to the barkeeper. "I've got company home, an' they're waitin' for me."

"All right," was the reply, and in a very few minutes the jug was placed upon the bar.

The half-breed was still puffing slowly at his cigar, and nodding pleasantly to Hop, he picked up his jug, and said:

"I'll see yer later, heathen. Jest now I've got business on hand."

"Allee light," was the reply, and then Rattler started for the door.

He had nearly reached it when there was a sharp click and his cigar flew to pieces, while left in his mouth instead was a long spiral string with a tiny doll dangling at the end.

"Wow!" he yelled, as he quickly threw the end to the floor. "What's that?"

"Lat velly stlange," declared the Chinaman, as he stepped over and looked at the string, which had not ceased vibrating upon the floor. "Me no givee you lat; me allee samee givee you um cigar. Me buy um cigar in lis place, too. Velly stlange."

"I should think it was strange," declared one of the loungers, as he stooped and picked up the string.

He dangled it before the eyes of the rest, and the tiny doll bobbed up and down.

Then it was that the others broke into a roar of laughter, and finally the face of the half-breed relaxed into a smile.

He looked first at Hop, then at the barkeeper, and then his glance turned to the pieces of the cigar that were scattered about the floor.

"What do you call this, anyway," he demanded, as he kept his eyes fixed upon the barkeeper. "Did yer sell ther heathen that thing for a cigar?"

"Not that I know of," was the reply, and the man acted as though it was a mystery to him, which it certainly was.

"Me buy three cigars here this morning, so be," declared Hop, shaking his fingers at him, as though he did not want him to tell a lie. "Me no smokee lem, but me givee lis velly muchee handsome gentleman one. He lightee, and len when he smokee lille bit, um cigar fall ee allee part, so be. Nicee lillee doll baby jumpee outtee and dancee likee anything. Velly muchee stlange. Me no likee lem kind cigar, so be."

"Well, ther cigars I sold yer was right in ther box with ther others. If that was one of 'em ther feller what put 'em in ther box must have put it there for a joke. It ain't my fault, an' I'm putty sure ther boss don't know nothin' about it."

"Lat velly stlange," declared Hop, and then he pulled another cigar from his pocket. "Tly lis one, my handsome fliend."

"Not much," roared the half-breed, angrily. "That thing was enough fer me."

"Allee light, you takee one outee um box, len," and Hop beckoned for the barkeeper to hand him the box of cigars.

It was quickly handed to him, and then without anyone observing it he dropped the cigar he had in his hand into the box.

It happened that there was just two rows in the box, and the one he dropped in lay loosely there.

It was only natural that the half-breed should take this

one, and after he had put the box back upon the counter and paid for the cigar, Hop struck a match and offered it to him.

"All right," said Rattler. "I'll light her up. But if anything happens like it did ther last time I'll shoot that cigar box full of holes afore I leave ther place."

He puffed away almost viciously, remaining near the door as he did so.

Just as he thought the cigar was going all right there was a sharp hiss and then—

Bang!

With a report as loud as that of a shotgun, the cigar exploded.

The half-breed uttered a sharp cry of alarm, and falling back through the doorway, dropped his jug as he did so.

"Hip hi!" yelled the Chinaman, dancing about the room as though in great fear. "Whatee mattee? Whatee mattee?"

But the moment he saw Rattler getting upon his feet he slipped out of the rear door and vanished.

Young Wild West and his partners came rushing from the dining-room, for they had plainly heard the report and the shots, and had recognized the voice of Hop.

The proprietor, who was at the table with them, came also, as did Texas Jake, the old hunter.

The half-breed was in a terrible rage, for the jug had broken and its contents were being soaked up by the cracks in the floor.

He had a gun in his hand, and evidently meant to make his threat good, for he was advancing toward the bar.

The innocent box of cigars was still there, and it looked as though he was certainly going to fill it full of holes.

"Hold on there!" called out the proprietor of the hotel, sharply. "Don't you shoot in here. If yer do you'll get into trouble."

It was evident that the half-breed feared him somewhat, for he reluctantly lowered his revolver and dropped it back into the holster at his side.

"What's the matter, anyhow?" asked the hotelkeeper, turning to the man behind the bar, who stood there as though unable to speak.

"I—I don't know, boss," was the reply. "It seems that Rattler got hold of two very funny cigars which was bought here. One of 'em had a funny-lookin' string with a doll fastened to it in it, an' when ther string came out ther cigar flew all to pieces. There's ther string on ther floor over there, I reckon. But no it ain't, either. Where did it go ter, boys?"

The loungers, who were as much surprised as he appeared to be, shook their heads.

None of them knew where the string had gone. They had not observed the clever Chinaman pick it up before he left the room.

"It's gone," declared one of them, shaking his head. "Maybe ther heathen took it with him."

Cheyenne Charlie's face wore a broad grin.

"What was ther matter with ther other cigar?" he asked, looking at the barkeeper.

"That one had a big charge of powder in it, I reckon," was the reply. "When it went off Rattler was knocked clean off his feet, an' he broke his jug of rum at ther same time. That's what makes him so mad, I reckon."

The scout now burst into a laugh.

"Do you know anything about it?" queried the landlord, looking at him in surprise.

"I reckon he can guess how it was," spoke up our hero, who was smiling at the man. "Our clever Chinaman was responsible for it all, I suppose. He is always up to such tricks, you know. The two cigars never came from here, that's sure. He carries such cigars about with him, just to have a little fun now and then. But I reckon we'll soon settle this thing. Give the fellow another jug of tangle-foot, and give him a couple of cigars, too. I'll pay the bill."

Rattler at once became mollified.

"All right," he said. "It may be very funny, but if I ketch that heathen I'll give him somethin' he don't want, an' you kin bet your life on that."

"Well, so long as you don't hurt him very much it will be all right," said Wild, in his cool and easy way. "But don't go to using a gun on him; if you do you will get filled full of lead."

"You won't do it, young feller," and the half-breed showed that he had considerable spunk in him. "I don't want to have you make any threats to me, either."

Rattler did not attempt to pull his gun, but he took a step forward as though he were going to take hold of the boy.

The next minute something happened to him.

With a lightning-like move Young Wild West caught him about the neck with one arm, and seized him by the calf of his leg with his right hand.

Then he threw him out of the door as easily as though he had been handling a sack of grain.

"Fill up his jug, barkeeper," he said, "and give me the two cigars for him. I'll start him for home in a jiffy. I reckon he'll find out that he can't fool with me, even if our clever Chineese did play a trick on him. But I won't hurt him any."

Before the bartender could get out another jug of rum Rattler was upon his feet.

He uttered a roar like that of a mad bull and rushed back into the room.

This time he had a knife in his hand, and the fierce look upon his ugly face told that he was ready to commit murder.

Wild stood stock still in his tracks until the man made a lunge at him with the knife.

Then he quickly stepped to the right, and with a sharp blow sent the knife from his hand.

The next instant the half-breed was whirling through the air, and when he landed he was outside the barroom again.

"I don't want to hurt you," called out the boy, sharply. "But don't try anything like that again."

The fall had jarred the man so much that his breath was nearly taken from him, and for the space of a few seconds he sat upon the ground, looking about him in a dazed sort of way.

"You done that, young feller?" he questioned, as he looked at the boy, who was standing in the doorway.

"Yes, I did it," was the reply. "But, as I just said, I didn't want to hurt you, so if you take my advice you'll take your jug and light out."

"You done it all alone, too, eh?"

"Yes, I didn't need any help to do a thing like that."

"All right, I guess I'll do as you say. I'll take ther jug an' go home. I got very mad, 'cause I can't help it. But I soon git over it, an' I'm glad I didn't stick my knife in you. I don't want to fight with yer, for you kin do things I never saw a man do. I'm sorry, young feller."

"All right. Let it go at that."

Wild walked back into the room, while the barkeeper took the jug outside.

Rattler got upon his feet and accepted it meekly.

"Give him the cigars, too," called out our hero.

"All right, Young Wild West," was the reply. "I've got 'em right here."

The half-breed accepted them, and then he said:

"Oh, I reckon I understand now. Ther boy is Young Wild West, eh? If I had knowed it at first I wouldn't have said a word to him. I've heard tell of him, an' I reckon what I've heard about him ain't no lie. I'm off now."

True to his words, he hurried from the spot, carrying the jug as though it was something of great value, and should be handled with care.

Then our friends went in to finish their interrupted dinner.

"Well, that Chineese beats anything I ever seen," declared the old hunter. "I reckon I want ter see more of him."

"Most likely you'll see enough of him afore you git through," answered the scout, shrugging his shoulders and smiling.

CHAPTER III.

THE HALF-BREED SHOWS HIS HAND.

Our friends took their time at eating dinner, and as they were not interrupted again, everything passed off satisfactorily.

The girls listened as Texas Jake related his thrilling adventures with the Comanches. Such things always interested them, Arietta, especially.

"You are sure they are Comanches?" she asked, as the hunter paused and leaned back in his chair.

"Oh, yes!" was the reply; "I'm sure of that, miss. I knows a Comanche when I sees him. These is genuine Comanches, too. Ther kind my old dad used ter tell about. I know their lingo putty well, an' I heard lots of talkin' when I was hangin' around ther village. There ain't no mistake about it."

"Well, I guess that particular tribe used to be thick around this section, anyway," Wild spoke up. "I suppose this crowd is made up from the descendants of the old-timers, who did not want to make war on the palefaces, and went off by themselves. It is what you might call a colony, I suppose. They are living in the old barbaric style, true to their instincts, most likely. I reckon it will be worth our while to make the trip there and study them up a bit."

"It surely will, Wild," Arietta answered, her eyes brightening. "I am very anxious to see them."

"What!" exclaimed Texas Jake, looking at the girl in astonishment. "You don't mean to go too, do you?"

"Oh, yes," and Arietta smiled at him in a way that told

plainly that she was not the least bit afraid to make the journey.

"Gosh, I don't think it will be hardly right to take a gal up there. What do yer think about it, Young Wild West?"

"Oh, I reckon it will be all right," replied the boy. "The girls are used to all sorts of adventures, you know. They can shoot, if there is any fighting to be done, too. But we are not going up there in the mountains for the sake of shooting the Comanches. We are simply going out of curiosity. It might be that we might strike something in the way of a treasure there. The Indians of the old times are known to be something of miners. There is no telling but that they might have a whole lot of gold and silver in their village. If we find that such is the case probably we can induce them to part with some of it. I reckon it will be a good idea to take along some pieces of calico and rolls of ribbon, and the like. Such things usually strike barbarians right to the heart. They are always fond of finery, I have heard."

"Well, maybe you are right," and the old hunter shook his head. "But I don't jest know about it. Howsomever, I'll go with yer, 'cause I've said I would. I've got rid of all my pelts, an' I was goin' ter start out ag'in in a few days, anyhow. I'll go up there with yer, an' on ther way I kin do quite a little huntin'. I left some traps up that way, an' I kin set them, too. Whenever you git ready to start you'll find me right on hand, Young Wild West."

"All right, Texas Jake," was the reply. "We'll start at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, then. We intended leaving the town at that time, anyway, so we'll strike out right for the mountains, where this Comanche village is located, according to what you say."

"She's there, all right," declared the hunter, nodding to give emphasis to his words. "I'll take yer right to it, leastwise I'll take yer near enough so yer kin see it. I won't say that I'll ride right into ther village, 'cause ther chances are that I wouldn't be allowed to. I'd be stuck full of arrers afore I could git that far."

There was no one among our friends who had the least doubt about the truth of what Texas Jake had told them.

The very fact that he was willing to go with them to the place was quite sufficient to show that he had not prevaricated.

It so happened that our friends and the hunter were the only guests at dinner that day, so they lingered quite a while at the table.

When they at last arose it was settled that they were to leave the next morning at eight o'clock.

"Now then," said Wild, as he started from the dining-room, "I reckon I'll go and see where our two Chinamen are. Hop could not help getting into trouble with that half-breed, it seems. I wasn't looking for anything of the kind, but I could not help it, especially when the galoot started for me. But I hope he is satisfied."

"But it ain't likely he is, though," spoke up Texas Jake, shaking his head. "I know Rattler, an' he's a mighty bad galoot. He's as tricky as anything, he is. I forgot to tell yer something about him when I started to tell my story. I met him on ther way into Clayton an' I told him how I'd seen ther Injun's village up in ther mountains."

"I thought yer said yer didn't say a word about it till yer got to ther hotel here?" queried Cheyenne Charlie.

"I did say that, but I sorter forgot that I rode into town with ther half-breed. But that don't make no difference, I reckon."

"Not much, anyway," Wild said, assuringly. "But what did the half-breed say when you told him about the Comanches you had seen?"

"Well, he seemed to know somethin' about 'em. He says as how his grandfather is one of 'em. There's Injuns as knows that they're up there, but none of 'em ever bother about goin' to see 'em, it appears."

"Ah!" and our hero shook his head. "So it was not exactly a secret, then?"

"Well, I reckon ther most of it has been hearsay," declared the hunter. "Rattler wouldn't say as how he knowed it for sartin; he was only talkin' from what he had heard. His father told him once that his grandfather was livin' back in ther mountains with a lot of his own people, ther same as they used to live a hundred years ago. But Rattler says he never took much stock in it. He told me that he would never bother about goin' up there to see about it."

"Well, I don't know nothing about it," said Cheyenne Charlie, shrugging his shoulders. "But I'll bet if that half-breed galoot finds out that we're goin' up there he'll take it in his head to go, too. It are putty sartin that he has taken a strong dislike to Wild for what happened to him this noon, an' that bein' ther case it are most likely that he'll think about gittin' revenge. If he's half a Comanche, which there ain't no doubt that he is, an' he knows that we're goin' up to bother with his grandfather's people, he'll sorter think it a good idea to foller us an' look for his chance to drop Wild. I knowed very well he was lyin' when he said he was sorry when he pulled his knife, for I could tell by ther looks of him at ther time that he certainly meant to stick it between Wild's ribs. If he meant to do it then, he'll mean it some other time."

"That's all right, Charlie," Wild answered, quickly. "If he wants to follow us I suppose he has a right to, so long as he don't interfere with us. I reckon we can take care of him all right, if he shows a disposition to do anything wrong."

The young deadshot went on out, leaving the girls in the parlor of the hotel.

Hop was not in the barroom, but they quickly learned from the proprietor that he was eating his dinner with the servants in the kitchen.

The boy was not satisfied, so he made his way to the kitchen, and when he found both Hop and Wing there he came back.

"Mighty funny Chinees, that," the barkeeper remarked. "Who would ever have thought that he could do a thing like that? Why, I thought sure them cigars had come out of that box here, especially ther last one. I didn't see him put one in it when he passed it over to Rattler."

"Well, he is a sleight-of-hand performer, you know," Wild answered, with a smile. "He is very handy at making all sorts of things, too. He can make firecrackers and all kinds of fireworks, as well as cigars. I suppose he has spent a whole lot of time in making that cigar with the string in it. There is no doubt but that he will make another with the same string, for it is likely that he has tobacco on hand. He carries quite a stock, and it is com-

posed of many things that no one would think of taking along with him on a journey."

While they were talking in came the half-breed again, carrying the jug he had taken away, which was empty now.

He was in a pretty drunken state, too, and as he placed the jug upon the bar he called out:

"Fill her up ag'in. I've got company over to ther house, an' I want ter treat 'em right."

As he made no move to lay the money upon the bar, the barkeeper shook his head.

Evidently he knew the half-breed was not very good pay.

"Show ther color of your dust, Rattler," he said, calmly.

"That's all right," was the dogged retort. "Don't you think I've got it?"

"Well, you know you owe a bill here now, so what yer git must be for cash."

"Fill up ther jug; I'll pay for it."

"Produce the money," spoke up the proprietor, who was leaning against the bar at the other end. "I don't think you need any more just now, anyway. If you haven't any money you get no rum."

"Well, if I ain't got ther money, maybe Young Wild West will pay fer it," the half-breed said, as he shot a glance at our hero. "He oughter do that, anyhow, 'cause he give me sich a lickin' a little while ago."

"If it was something to eat you wanted, and you had no money, I would gladly pay for it," Wild answered, coolly. "But when it comes to a jug of liquor I draw the line. You take my advice and go on back home and take a sleep. You don't need any more rum, just now."

"All right; I'll do as you say, Young Wild West," and without another word the half-breed left the jug upon the bar and quickly went outside.

But there was a look upon his face that told our hero he had better be on the watch.

There was a window near the end of the bar, and quickly stepping over to it he took his station right at the side.

It seemed that the boy had really divined the intention of the half-breed, for the next minute a revolver was thrust through the opening below the sash, and the boy saw the half-breed crouching and waiting for a chance to shoot.

He waited until he raised his hands to a level with the sill, so he might take aim, and then as quick as a flash he knocked the weapon from his hand and seized him by the collar of his shirt.

Wild was as strong as a young mountain lion, and with a quick pull he lifted the villain from the ground and dragged him through the window.

"I don't know who you was going to shoot, you half-breed galoot!" he exclaimed, his eyes flashing dangerously; "but I reckon you was looking for me. Now then, I'm going to give you one more chance for your life. Get up here!"

He half lifted him to his feet, and his face distorted with passion, Rattler stood in a crouching attitude.

"I meant to shoot you, Young Wild West!" he hissed.

"There ain't no use in lym' about it. I've got it in for you, an' I'll git yer if it takes a month."

"You will, eh, you sneaking scoundrel!"

As the words left the lips of our hero he gave the villain a push that sent him sprawling.

Then, before he could recover himself, he dealt him a blow under the chin and down he went upon the floor.

"I ought to shoot you!" he exclaimed, as he stood over the fallen man. "But I won't do that. I said I was going to give you another chance for your life, and I will keep my word, even though you made a hard threat against me just now. You get up and light out, do you hear?"

Rattler lost no time in obeying.

He hurried out of the building and started on a quick walk away from it.

Wild and the rest of those in the place watched him until he reached a tumbledown shanty, which the proprietor said was his home.

"He's a bad fellow," the proprietor said, shaking his head and looking at our hero. "I never liked to have him come in here. He owes me more than fifty dollars, and every time he gets drunk he tries to make it more. Sometimes I have to let him have rum to keep him from breaking things up in here. He's the worst man we have got in the village."

"Well," was the reply, "if he interferes with me again, I shall certainly shoot him. I am sorry our clever Chinaman did anything to cause trouble between us, but it can't be helped now. If the galoot hasn't sense enough to know when he is well off, he will have to take his medicine, that's all."

"You're certainly a mighty cool hand, Young Wild West," and the proprietor of the hotel looked at the boy admiringly. "I wish I was something like you. I could run my business a great deal better than I do, I reckon."

"Well, never mind about that. I reckon you can be just as cool as I am, if you make up your mind you are going to do it."

"No, I can't," and the man shook his head, as though that would be impossible. "I reckon it must have been born in you. What you do has come to you natural."

"Well, I won't say that it hasn't. But I suppose I have cultivated quite a lot. It is very easy to keep cool, and when a man can do that, he has certainly got the best of it every time. By keeping cool one always knows just what not to do."

"I suppose you are right on that. But say! that heathen Chineese of yours is a pretty cool hand, too. He must be, or he couldn't do the things he does."

"Me velly smartee Chineese," said a voice at that very moment, and then in stepped Hop, bowing and smiling.

"Here he is now," and the proprietor broke into a laugh. "Hello, Hop! Have you got any more cigars about you?"

"Me gottee two or thlee," was the reply. "You likee havee nicee lillee smoke?"

"No, thank you. But I would like to see how one of them cigars acts when it goes off."

"Me showee you, maybe, before me go 'way from here. But me likee havee goodee smokee, so me buy one, so be."

Then the Chinaman stepped up to the bar and the barkeeper promptly set out the box for him to make his selection.

He took one and placed it in his mouth.

Then he quickly picked up the box and passed it to the proprietor.

"You takee one, too, so be," he said.

"Well, since you want to treat me, I believe I will

smoke," was the reply, and the man reached in and took the first cigar he came to.

Cheyenne Charlie gave Wild a nudge and whispered:

"I'll bet anything ther heathen has put a cigar in there, an' he's goin' ter fool him."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," was the reply.

The fact was that Hop had really dropped a doctored cigar into the box as he was in the act of passing it to the proprietor.

He held the box in such a way that he forced him to take it, though the man never had the least idea that there was anything wrong.

But that was a way the clever magician had. He could make people do things he wanted them to, and they would know nothing of it.

After he had lighted his own cigar Hop struck a match and politely tendered it to the proprietor.

"Thank you, Hop," and soon the cigar was going nicely.

"Before me go 'way from here me allee samee showee you how um tlick cigars act, so be," declared Hop, as he walked slowly around the room, puffing away meanwhile.

The landlord nodded, and then took a few more puffs at the cigar.

Suddenly there was a quick puff of smoke, and then—
Bang!

The cigar went off with a report that almost deafened the smoker.

Just what there was in it no one could tell, but it certainly was something that made a report.

"Great Scott!" cried the proprietor, as he leaped backward and fell against a door. "What's that, anyhow?"

There was a loud laugh from our hero and his partners and Texas Jake.

They saw just what had happened, though the victim could hardly realize it himself.

But it quickly occurred to him that he had been victimized, though he could not tell for the life of him how it had been done.

He had surely taken one of the cigars he had for sale from the box.

If he had been put under oath before a justice he would have sworn to that.

But that simply showed how easily he could be deceived.

Wild ran over to him and quickly brushed the pieces of burning tobacco from his clothing, and then he said:

"Well, I reckon he has showed you how his trick cigars work, all right, boss. I suppose you're going to take it as a joke. It was a little rough on you, I'll admit."

"Take it as a joke!" exclaimed the man. "Why, of course I will. It was all my fault. I heard all about the heathen, and I shouldn't have taken a cigar from the box, even if I knew it was my own box. Gracious! But that certainly did startle me, though."

Then, to set himself right, he ordered the barkeeper to treat all hands.

Nothing worthy of mentioning happened through the balance of the day, and that night Young Wild West and his friends retired rather early, so they would be ready to make an early start for the Comanche village in the mountains.

CHAPTER IV.

OUR FRIENDS NEAR THEIR DESTINATION.

Our friends arose rather early the next morning.

It was necessary to see to the loading of the pack-horses and find out what extras were needed to take with them.

Texas Jake declared it was a hundred miles to the Comanche village, as the crow flies, and this meant that they would have to travel a great deal farther than that before they got there.

Mountain trails do not run in a very straight line, as a rule, and they are not easy to ride over, either.

But Young Wild West was satisfied that they could make the distance in three days, and take it rather easy, at that.

The biggest part of the journey would be comparatively easy traveling.

The two Chinamen were routed out by Cheyenne Charlie as soon as he got up, and then he went over the supplies they had on hand with Wing.

It did not take long to make a list of what they needed, and after breakfast the two went to the store and bought them.

"We'll be gone more than a week, most likely," the scout declared, "so there ain't no use in runnin' short of coffee, sugar, an' ther like. I always likes my coffee sweet, though I've seen times when I was glad ter git it without sugar."

"I reckon you have, Charlie," Jim Dart answered, with a smile. "You've seen the time when you couldn't get it at all, too."

"Oh, yes, Jim. There ain't no mistake about that, But sich things is bound ter happen. There ain't no use in lettin' 'em happen, if yer kin help it, though. I reckon here's where we kin see ter it that it ain't likely ter happen."

"Well, no matter what preparations we make, something might turn up against us, Charlie."

"That's all right, Jim. Of course, somethin' might turn up. But what's ther use of talkin' about what might happen? We'll wait till it does happen afore we begin talkin' about it."

"All right, Charlie," and Dart laughed. "I never worry about what might happen, you know. I merely said that to show you that you must never feel sure about anything."

"Well, I do feel sure that we ain't goin' ter be without our coffee on this trip, anyhow," retorted the scout, bound to have the last word.

A few minutes before eight they were ready to leave.

But our hero always made it a point to make a start at the time set down, unless circumstances would not permit it.

Texas Jake was there with his mustang and the burro he used to help carry in his pelts, and when he suggested that they might as well be off, our hero shook his head.

"It is just five minutes to eight now," he declared, as he looked at his watch. "We decided that we would leave at eight, so we will wait until my watch shows that time. I want to time ourselves in making the trip, and I am going to put it into minutes."

"All right, Wild," was the reply. "I reckon you're ther boss of ther expedition. What you say will go every time."

At just eight o'clock they all mounted, and bidding the hotel-keeper and those waiting to see them off good-by, the party set out.

Of course, it had become generally known throughout the village that Young Wild West and his friends were going off to the mountains with Texas Jake to look for a band of Comanches that were supposed to be living in seclusion there; but few took much stock in the hunter's story.

Those who did think there might be some truth in it would not have taken the trouble to find out, so it is probable that they soon forgot all about it.

With the little town of Clayton once behind them Young Wild West and his companions soon found themselves traveling over a rugged and rather wild part of the country.

This continued to increase as they proceeded, and when noon came they found themselves at the beginning of the foothills of the range they were heading for.

Wild selected a suitable spot and called a halt.

They all dismounted and soon the pack-horses were relieved of their loads, after which the two Chinamen set themselves at work getting the noonday meal ready.

Hop gathered sufficient wood for the purpose and started the fire, and then it was not long before Wing had some venison steaks broiling.

They had not bothered to shoot any game during the morning, but they were in a part of the country where they knew it must be abundant now, and they meant to try their hand at it before sunset.

While the meal was being prepared Wild walked to the top of a hill that was not far from the temporary camp, and took a look over the back trail.

He was not much surprised when he saw a horseman riding along about two miles distant.

It was too far away for him to distinguish him, but he readily guessed that it was the half-breed, who had, no doubt, followed them from the town.

"I reckon that fellow means business," he muttered, as he watched the horseman as he followed the trail. "Well, I'm sorry I had any trouble with him, but if it comes to the point I reckon he's got to go down, that's all. Such a galoot as he is is not safe to be at large, anyhow. He hates me like poison, I suppose, and that means that I will have to look out for myself."

After watching the horseman for a few minutes the boy descended the hill and returned to the camp.

"Well, Charlie," said he, as he looked at the scout, "I reckon the half-breed galoot means business, for he is following our trail. He is less than two miles from here now."

"Great gimlets!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, giving a start. "Is that so, Wild? I sorter thought he would come after us, but I looked around so many times this mornin', an' didn't see nothin' of anyone, that I thought maybe I was wrong in thinkin' that way. So ther half-breed is comin', eh? Well, I reckon we'll attend to him."

"What's that you said, Wild?" called out the dashing young deadshot's sweetheart, as she walked hastily to the spot.

"Nothing much, Et," was the reply. "The half-breed I

had the trouble with over at Clayton is following us, that's all."

"I knowed it!" exclaimed Texas Jake, giving a nod. "That galoot is jest one of ther kind to go a hundred miles to git revenge. Rattler is sartinly a bad one."

"Are you sure it was he you saw, Wild?" Dart asked.

"Well, I'm not exactly sure, for the distance was a little too great; but I'm satisfied that it is he, Jim," the boy answered, coolly. "Just go up the hill and take a look."

Jim lost no time in ascending the hill.

He remained there for nearly ten minutes, and when he came down he gave a nod.

"It is the half-breed, all right," he declared. "I watched him until he came to a halt less than half a mile from this spot. No doubt he has seen the smoke from our fire, and don't intend to come any closer just now."

"Well, I don't think I shall bother myself about going out to look for him," Wild retorted, shrugging his shoulders. "We'll just let him do the following in this case. We'll keep right on until we find the Comanches we are looking for; and in the meantime we will be on the watch for Rattler."

But Jim did not seem to be as easy about it as our hero, and back he went to the top of the hill to look out for the half-breed.

No doubt he felt that the villain might try to creep upon them and get a shot at Wild while they were at a halt.

Meanwhile the preparations for the noonday meal went rapidly ahead, and it was not long before the cook called them to eat.

Wild beckoned to Jim to come on down, but the boy shook his head and motioned for them to proceed.

"I reckon Jim must be afraid the galoot will sneak up close enough to us to get a shot," said our hero, as he sat down and helped himself to the portion of meat that had been placed before him by the cook. "Well, probably it is just as well. If he is satisfied to stay up there until we get through, it is all right. I won't be long in swallowing what I want, and then I'll go up there and relieve him."

When the young deadshot had eaten all he wanted he promptly arose and ascended the hill to relieve Dart.

"Well, how is he now, Jim?" he asked, as he reached the side of the boy.

"The galoot is sneaking up here, Wild," was the retort. "He left his horse in a hollow below there nearly ten minutes ago. I've been watching closely, but have not seen anything of him since."

"Well, you go on down and get your dinner. I'll keep on the watch. I reckon if he shows up I'll show him, all right."

Jim went on down, while our hero took his place where he could keep a watch on all sides of the spot.

Two minutes later he saw something moving about a hundred yards to the left, and fixing his eyes on the spot, he was not long in detecting the form of a man as he moved from bush to bush.

"I reckon that's the galoot, all right," he muttered, under his breath. "Well, he's looking for a chance to shoot me, I suppose, so I may as well give him a surprise. I don't want his blood on my hands, but I'll just wake him up a bit, anyhow."

Holding his rifle ready for instant use, he watched and waited.

It was not long before he got a good view of the man as he paused and raised above a rock.

It was Rattler. There was no mistake about that.

Wild saw that he was looking down directly toward the camp, so he thought he had better give him the surprise he intended for him.

He coolly threw his Winchester to his shoulder, and then taking a quick aim pulled the trigger.

Crang!

As the report rang out Rattler's hat flew from his head, and with a yell of surprise and fear, the villain dropped quickly from sight.

"I suppose some people would think that I killed him, if they had seen that move out of him," muttered the dashing young deadshot, with a laugh. "But I just knocked his hat from his head and took some of his hair with it, that's all. I don't fear the galoot much, or I would have shot to kill him. Maybe he will have sense enough to turn around and go back now."

Satisfied that they would not see anything more of the half-breed for a while, Wild went down the hill and joined his companions at the camp.

"Did yer fix ther galoot, Wild?" the scout asked.

"No, Charlie," was the reply. "I just shot his hat off, that's all."

"That's where yer made a mistake, I reckon. That won't have no effect on him, I'm sartin."

"Well, maybe it won't. But I reckon it will make him be a little careful how he sneaks toward us again."

It was evident that the scout feared that the half-breed would not take a lesson from what had happened to him, for he went up the hill and took his station there until they were ready to leave the spot.

He had the satisfaction of seeing the half-breed return to where he had left his horse, so that told him plainly that there was nothing to be feared from him just then.

It was just about an hour after our friends came to a halt that the journey was resumed.

As they started off Cheyenne Charlie insisted on fetching up the rear, for he wanted to get a shot at the half-breed.

Wild knew very well that if he happened to do so it would probably be the last of the half-breed.

But he said nothing, for he knew quite well that the scout would be justified in shooting him.

But the afternoon wore on and nothing further was seen of the solitary trailer.

Shortly before sunset they pitched their camp at the mouth of a deep ravine, where a little cascade came tumbling down the rocks.

The vegetation was luxuriant at this point, and it certainly was an admirable spot to camp at.

There was plenty of grass for the horses, and water for the use of all hands, while the face of the cliff and the rocks that lay scattered near it would afford them shelter from the attack of anyone.

Wild knew very well that if the half-breed was persistent he would surely try to gain his point during the night, so he saw to it that a good watch was kept.

Since there were four of them to do duty in this re-

spect, it would give all hands a chance to get what sleep they required.

There would be about ten hours of darkness, so it was settled that Texas Jake should take the first two hours and a half, Jim Dart the second, Wild the third and Charlie the last hitch.

If nothing happened by the time the scout had done his trick at watching it would be getting daylight.

Whether the half-breed tried to get close enough to get a shot at the boy he hated so or not, none of them knew, for the night passed and day broke without anything happening.

The probabilities are that if Rattler did creep up to the camp he found it so well guarded that he feared to take the risk.

As soon as it was light enough Cheyenne Charlie called the two Chinamen, and in doing so he aroused the rest of the sleepers.

The result was that in a few minutes all were stirring, and the preparations for the breakfast were going ahead rapidly.

When the morning meal had been eaten they were not long in loading the pack-horses, and then a few minutes later they were moving up the ascent.

Wild knew they had covered more than fifty miles the first day, and he now began to think that they would reach their destination in less than three days, unless they met with serious obstacles.

About the middle of the forenoon Arietta shot a young buck, which showed itself as it ran along a ledge something like two hundred yards distant from the trail they were following.

"That's a mighty good shot," declared the hunter, as he saw the buck rear backward and then plunge toward the foot of the cliff. "I couldn't do that myself, not more than once out of a dozen times."

"Well, Et is something like myself," Wild retorted, a smile showing on his face. "She never pulls a trigger unless she is sure she has her target covered. I reckon we'll have to stop and get the deer. Hop, run down there and cut off the haunches. I reckon we don't bother with the skin."

"Oh, yes we will!" exclaimed Texas Jake. "I'll take charge of that, if yer don't mind. That all goes in my line of business, yer know. I'll go with Hop, an' it won't be long before we'll have things fixed up."

"All right; go ahead, then."

While the two were attending to the slain deer the rest waited on the slope.

They did not fail to keep a watch for the appearance of Rattler, but nothing was seen of him.

It was not very long before Hop and the hunter returned with the venison and the skin.

Then the journey was resumed.

They continued on all day without anything happening, save that more game was shot, since it was very plentiful in that part of the country.

That night they found a camping place that was almost as good as the one they had occupied the night before.

It seemed that the half-breed was no longer following them, or if he was, he made it a point not to get too close to them, for the night passed in silence.

The next morning as they were mounting to proceed on their way, our hero gave a satisfied nod and said:

"Well, I reckon we have covered nearly a hundred miles, Jake. But not in a straight line, though. Still, we are well up in the mountains now, and it can't be that the Comanche village is very far away."

"I was thinkin' that myself," was the reply. "We've come up a little straighter route than I took, an' if I'm anything of a judge we oughter strike ther spot afore noon. I can't jest recognize any landmarks around here, 'cause I never was here afore. But I know we're goin' in ther right direction, all right."

"Well, we'll keep on, and we will go a little cautious now, for there is no telling how soon we might come on some of the redskins. The chances are that they come quite a distance from their village to hunt. No matter how much game we come across, we will not do any shooting this morning."

When they had been riding along a very rough part of the mountainside for about an hour they suddenly came upon the fresh hoof-prints of a horse.

"Ah!" exclaimed Young Wild West, as he brought his sorrel stallion to a halt. "I wonder what this means? It looks as though the half-breed has got ahead of us."

"Or maybe someone else is around here, Wild," suggested Arietta.

"No," and the boy shook his head. "I am satisfied that the hoof-prints we see were made by Rattler's horse. Now then, I reckon we have got to go a little cautious. Probably the galoot is waiting for us in ambush somewhere."

After thinking it over for a minute or two Wild thought it would be advisable for him to go ahead and make an investigation.

He told them to stay right there until he came back, and then he rode on over the course of a little hill. As he reached a point in the rocky wall that reared itself upon the level he came in sight of something that caused him to bring his horse to an abrupt halt.

Less than a hundred yards ahead of him he saw Rattler, the half-breed, standing upon the ground, talking to three Indians who were naked to the waist.

That the redskins were Comanches who belonged to the hidden village in the mountains Wild had not the least doubt, for they all carried bows and arrows and spears and tomahawks.

The boy quickly drew back his horse, so he could not be seen, and then dismounted.

CHAPTER V.

OUR FRIENDS CAMP ABOVE THE VALLEY.

Young Wild West watched the half-breed and the three Indians intently.

He understood the language of the Comanches fairly well, though he could not talk it fluently himself.

When he listened and heard Rattler talking glibly with the three he realized that the villain was making himself friendly with them.

For fully five minutes the four stood there talking, and then the three Comanches nodded their heads and told the half-breed he might come with them.

The result was that Rattler stepped back behind some rocks and led forth his horse.

Then he followed the three around a bend and disappeared from our hero's view.

"That's what I call pretty good," the boy muttered. "That galoot was clever enough to get ahead of us and make friends with the Comanches. Well, I suppose that means we are going to have trouble, for he will surely set them against us. But it is all right. We started to find the Comanche village and see what it looked like, and I reckon we are going to do it, half-breed, or no half-breed!"

Taking the sorrel stallion by the bridle, Wild made his way back to his waiting companions.

"Did you see or hear anything, Wild?" Arietta asked, looking at him eagerly.

"Yes, I saw something and I heard something, Et," was the reply. "I saw my half-breed enemy with three Comanches a little way from here and heard them talking, too."

"Is that so?"

The girl's eyes brightened as she spoke.

"Yes. It seems that Rattler got here ahead of us, and that he has succeeded in making himself friendly with the redskins. The three he met are taking him to their village now. But come on. I reckon we will go a little closer, and then we can look around for a good place to pitch our camp. We want to find a spot where we can stand a siege, if it should be necessary. It is most likely the Comanches will try to drive us away, or perhaps kill us. If it happens that Rattler's grandfather really was a member of the tribe, and he can satisfy them about it, he will most likely have more or less influence with them. Of course he wants revenge upon me, and that means that he would incite the Comanches against us, if he could do so."

"That's a sure thing," Jim Dart spoke up.

"Of course it is," chimed in the scout. "Ther galoot will do his level best to have us cleaned out."

"Rattler is a mighty bad man," declared Texas Jake, shaking his head. "I'm mighty sorry ther galoot got down on yer, Wild. He may be ther means of causin' an awful lot of trouble for us."

"Well, let him go ahead," the young deadshot replied, calmly. "The very next time I catch him in the act of trying to shoot at me, or any of the rest of you, I'm going to cut his life short."

"I'm goin' ter cut his life short the first time I set eyes on him!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, his eyes flashing.

"You want to go a little careful, Charlie," Wild advised. "Since he is on friendly terms with the Comanches, maybe it would be best for us not to shoot him, unless there is some good cause for it. By doing so it would only incite the redskins against us, and then we might have a hot time of it, even if they have no firearms."

They all agreed to this, for it seemed that Wild always said the right thing at the right time.

They rode on until they reached the spot where Wild had seen the half-breed and the Indians talking together, and then they came to a halt.

Our hero dismounted and quickly climbed to the top of a big rock, so he might look around and find out where the village was, if it happened to be near at hand.

But he could see nothing of it, nor could the half-breed or the three Indians be seen anywhere.

A broken slope that ran for half a mile and was covered with pines, firs, stunted oaks and cedars, not to speak of bushes of all kinds common to that region, lay before his gaze.

"I reckon the village must be the other side of the top of the rise over there," he thought, and then after taking another good look and seeing nothing, he went back and joined his waiting companions.

"I reckon we might as well go on a little further then," said the scout, when the boy had made his report. "But it ain't more'n half a mile to ther top of ther ridge, anyhow. Them three Injuns might have been takin' a hunt around for some game, or somethin' like that, when they met ther half-breed galoot."

Our hero nodded, for what the scout said struck him as being right.

Then they rode on up the slope, picking their way along where the traveling was best.

The ground was hard and stony, and there were no traces of the trail that had been taken by Rattler and the Indians.

But just as they neared the top of the ridge they came upon a spot where the soil was soft and yielding, and then they saw not only the hoof-prints of Rattler's horse, but the prints of moccasined feet, as well.

Our hero called a halt, and then all hands dismounted.

They all felt that they were close to the Indian village now, and that they must be very cautious.

Wild quickly started forward, followed closely by the scout.

Then Arietta, anxious to see what lay below, hurriedly joined them.

As they peered between a break among the rocks they caught sight of a very beautiful scene.

It was nothing more or less than the picturesque village of the Comanche tribe.

It was about a quarter of a mile distant in a little valley that must have been at least five hundred feet below them.

The vegetation that abounded in the valley was surprising to them, for it seemed to be almost like that of the semi-tropics.

As near as they could judge the valley must have extended as far as ten miles across it, while they could not tell how far it ran the other way.

Fields of grain were to be seen, while the corn grew in abundance.

The village itself lay close at the foot of the steep descent they were looking down upon, and it consisted of tepees made of skins and several rude log shanties.

As they took a better look at the scene they could tell that the grain had been cut and gathered in, and that it was the stubble they were looking at.

But the corn still stood, which showed that the season extended later in the valley than it did at other points in that section.

"That's what I call a pretty nice sort of a place," said Young Wild West, after a rather lengthy interval of silence. "Seems strange to me that the white man has not come here long before this and taken possession of that valley. I have an idea that almost anything would grow there."

"That's so," answered Texas Jake. "But it seems there's

few people as comes up this way. Maybe there's plenty of Injuns what knows about ther place, an' that they're satisfied to let them that's there live without bein' interfered with. But there ain't many white men as ever comes up around this way. I never struck this place until my last huntin' trip. I've been around these mountains for years, too. But maybe yer took notice when we was comin' up this way that everything begun to look sorter barren like ther further we come. That's why I never took a notion to come this way. I didn't think there would be any use in looking for big game an' furs, you know. I generally went on around this ridge ther other side, where there's plenty of furs an' things to be had."

"Well, it makes no difference whether anybody came around here or not," and Young Wild West nodded his head sharply. "I reckon since we have got here we had better look for a good place to make our headquarters until we get through with our investigation of this tribe of Comanches. We'll strike out to the left along the top of the ridge, and let everybody be on the watch for the kind of place we want."

The boy quickly assisted his sweetheart to mount her horse, and then he gracefully swung himself into the saddle.

Then, with Arietta at his side, he rode along at the head of the column, taking care to keep far enough away from the top of the ridge to escape being seen by anyone below.

In this way they rode along for perhaps a quarter of a mile, and then just as the sound of rushing water came to their ears they came in sight of a little glen.

It lay at the foot of a rather steep slope, and as they rode down this Young Wild West quickly saw that they were approaching the very spot they were looking for.

Water was falling from the brow of a cliff nearly a hundred feet above and it came down in the form of a little cascade.

From the fall it made in the hollow ran a little break in snake-fashion through a cleft in the ride, and so on down into the valley below.

The glen was nearly in the form of a triangle, and was amply large enough for our friends to pitch their camp and have room for their horses to feed upon the luxuriant grass that grew along the banks of the little brook.

Wild saw that it would be impossible for them to be attacked very well, since the face of the cliff projected out away toward the top. This would make it impossible for anyone to even look upon them from the top.

There were but two ways to get into the hollow, too; one was by the way they were approaching it, and the other was through the break in the ridge where the brook flowed on down to the low ground below.

Even if they should be attacked from both points at one time there were so many rocks and massive boulders scattered about that they could keep themselves shielded from bullets, much less arrows and spears, such as the hunter declared the Comanches were armed with.

"I reckon this will do nicely," said Wild, as he rode down the sharp descent, and dismounted. "Hurry up, you two heathen! Just unload the pack-horses and get the camp in shape. We don't know just how long we are going to stop here, so I reckon it will be a good idea to move some of these rocks and make a little barricade. We've got water here and fodder for the horses, so I reckon we can stay a

week, if it becomes necessary. Since we have found the Comanche village I mean to learn all about it before we go away from here."

"That's the way to talk, Wild!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, nodding his approval. "This here valley is worth lookin' through, I reckon."

They were all soon busy at putting the camp in shape, and under the direction of our hero a few of the big stones that could be rolled over were soon moved so they would form a semi-circle at the front of the camping place.

While this was being done Wild did not forget to keep a watch for the appearance of the Indians or the half-breed.

Either he or Charlie or Jim were on the lookout all the time. But no one showed up to bother them, and at length the task was completed.

It was noon by this time, and as they were all very hungry Wild instructed Wing to go ahead and start a fire.

"They will find us anyway," he said, nodding to his partners, "so we may as well start a fire and let them see the smoke, if they're able to. There's no use of eating cold grub, when we can have it nice and hot. One thing, if Texas Jake is correct in saying that the Comanches have no firearms, Rattler is the only one we need fear in that respect. Indians can't shoot arrows very far, that's certain, and in order to do us any damage they would have to come so close that we could easily take care of them. But I have made up my mind that I don't want any of them shot unless it is absolutely necessary. If they are only armed with the barbarous weapons, such as their ancestors used, it would not be fair for us to shoot at them with our rifles and revolvers. Just remember that, everybody."

"I reckon it will be fair to shoot at ther half-breed, Wild," answered Cheyenne Charlie, quickly.

"Well, you heard what I said a little while ago, Charlie," was the reply. "He must not be shot, either, unless it is a sure thing that he means to kill one of us, or is in the act of doing it, in fact. Just remember that, too. If he has got on friendly terms with the Comanches, which seems to be the case, we would not help ourselves any by dropping him. Just keep an eye on him, and see that he don't get the chance to do us any harm, that's all."

"All right; jest as you say, Wild," and the scout at once gave in to the judgment of the dashing young deadshot.

The cook went about his business just as though there was nothing like danger anywhere near them. But he was so used to it, and had so much confidence in Young Wild West and his friends, that whenever he was told to go ahead and prepare a meal he went at it in the usual way.

While the dinner was being cooked Wild and Arietta followed the brook through the split in the ridge and soon reached a point from which they could look down into the valley.

They could see the Comanches quite plainly. There were men, women and children, and no end of dogs to be seen. But, as far as their range of vision went not a horse was in sight.

"Can it be that they haven't any horses, Et?" our hero asked, as he looked at his fair companion.

"Probably they haven't any, Wild," Arietta retorted. "That may be one reason for their staying here in seclusion. I see some cows over there, though."

"Oh, yes, they have plenty of cows. I noticed them when

I just looked into the valley. There are about a hundred of them, I should say. Probably they have oxen, too, and use them to plow the ground to cultivate. But that certainly is a very primitive looking village, Et. It don't look so barbarous, after all."

"That's right, Wild. It really looks like a very peaceful place, indeed."

"Well, I have an idea that the Comanches are not very warlike, so I reckon we need not be worried about that part of it. If it were not for that half-breed I would go right on down there and pay the redskins a friendly visit."

As Wild said this he stepped over to the edge of a steep descent, so he might get a look at something that lay around an angle of the cliff.

Arietta was about to follow him when she saw the rock he was standing upon slip over and cause the boy to lose his balance.

Wild uttered a sharp cry of alarm, and then went shooting down the descent, followed by a mass of loosened earth and stones.

CHAPTER VI.

YOUNG WILD WEST CAUGHT BY COMANCHES.

Wild went tumbling down the steep descent before he had a chance to catch himself.

He had not taken notice that the stone he stepped upon was loose, and hence it turned over without warning.

But fortunately for him, it did not topple and go down after the boy. With his weight off, it dropped back into its former place.

Our hero turned several impromptu somersaults and slid many feet before he could stop his descent any; but even then he could not keep himself from going down.

It was just about steep enough to prevent him from doing that, and there was absolutely nothing that he could catch hold of.

The result was that the young deadshot went on down for fully two hundred feet, and then he managed to clutch a bush and stop himself at the very brink of a precipice.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "I reckon that was one of the biggest surprises I've had in some time. I never once thought that big stone was going to turn over like that. I wonder what Et thinks about it? I got quite a few hard bumps, and a few scratches, too; but I reckon I am all right, just the same. But if I had not managed to grab this bush just as I did, it would have been all up with me! There is a straight drop there of nearly a hundred feet, and the rocks below are jagged and sharp. Well, I reckon my time hadn't come, that's all."

The boy's wonderful coolness had not deserted him, even while he was taking that fierce slide, and he now looked up where he had left his sweetheart without any warning.

There she stood, waving to him, for she no doubt feared to shout, lest she might attract the attention of the Indians in the valley.

Wild had lost his hat, of course, so he waved his hands in answer, and quickly let Arietta know he was all right. Then he set about to find a way to get up to her.

But he quickly saw that there was no chance for him to climb up that way. He must go around one way or the other.

"I reckon I'll go along to the right," he thought. "If I find I can't do it that way I'll come back and try the left. But I won't be long in getting up there. If I can't do it no other way I reckon Et can get three lariats and tie them together. Then I'll——"

A sudden interruption came. There was a whizzing sound and then the loop of a rope dropped over his head, and a quick jerk pinned the boy's arms to his sides.

The next instant Young Wild West was being dragged swiftly to the right!

"Look out, Et," he shouted at the top of his voice. "I reckon they have got me."

"Yell all yer want ter, Young Wild West," a voice near at hand called out. "But it won't do yer no good. Ther Comanches have got yer. You're goin' ter be burned at ther stake. Ha, ha, ha!"

Wild heard the voice and recognized it promptly as that of Rattler, the half-breed.

He made a desperate struggle to free himself, but before he threw the rope free from his arms two pairs of hands seized him and held him firmly to the ground.

The place he had been dragged to was almost level, and when he found four or five redskins and the half-breed standing over him he knew it was no use to struggle any further.

"You have got me all right, you sneaking coyote," he answered, coolly. "But it was only through an accident that you caught me. You couldn't have done it of your own accord, I reckon."

"Never mind how we got yer, Young Wild West," the half-breed answered, his black eyes sparkling with joy. "I got these Injuns to come up here for ther very purpose of getting you, an' if it was an accident it is all ther better for us."

Then the villain said something in the Comanche tongue to his companions, and the result was that Wild was quickly bound so he could not use his hands, while his revolvers and knife were quickly taken from him.

His captors did not linger there; taking their prisoner they hurried along a few yards, and then found a place where they could go down into the valley below.

It was quite a gentle descent, and was almost entirely covered by scrub oak and bushes.

Wild knew very well that his companions could not see him, even before they reached the cover of the trees and bushes.

But since they knew what had happened to him he felt that it was all right, anyhow.

Between Charlie, Jim and Arietta, a way would be found to rescue him, he had no doubt.

It was evident that the Comanches and the half-breed feared an attempt to rescue the boy would be made at once, for they ran on down the descent as fast as they could go, forcing Wild to run along with them, by keeping him in an upright position, and pushing him along.

Rattler had a revolver in his hand, too, and every time our hero tried to slacken his pace he leaned forward and pressed the muzzle of the weapon against the back of his head.

On they went, never stopping until the bottom of the descent was reached.

Then it was that the Comanches waved their tomahawks

over their heads and let out a yell that echoed through the valley.

Wild knew that this was done for a double purpose.

The redskins were giving vent to a feeling of triumph over his capture, and at the same time were calling others to the spot.

It was not long before a dozen or more were seen coming that way. It was evident that they knew what they might expect, for the moment they saw the captive white boy they brandished the spears they had with them and shouted in triumph.

Rattler gave a nod of extreme satisfaction, and then turning to Wild, he hissed:

"I reckon I'm goin' ter git my revenge, all right, Young Wild West. You didn't know what kind of a man you was dealin' with when you licked me over in Clayton, an' then chucked me out of ther hotel. I'm one of ther kind of galoots what never forgits a wrong that's done me. I'm half Injun an' half white man, an' ther Injun blood in me always cries for vengeance. Some of these Comanches is relatives of mine, though it's 'way back. I've proved that much to 'em, an' they're ready to do anything I say. I've told 'em what yer come here for—how yer expect ter carry away ther gold dust that's here, an' all that. You kin bet your life they're mad about that. They'll kill yer, that's what they'll do. They're goin' ter burn yer at ther stake, an' while your flesh is sizzling in ther flames I'm goin' ter dance around an' tantalize yer till your eyes are burned so yer can't see nothin' more. That's ther kind of a feller I am, Young Wild West. When I git revenge I wants it in ther right way. There couldn't be any better way than this."

"That's all right," the boy retorted, coolly. "Go ahead and get your revenge, you sneaking scoundrel. But I'm not dead yet; just remember that. I've been in worse fixes than this, and I have always got out all right. I reckon the Comanches are not as bad as you make them out. They are not going to kill me any kind of fashion."

The villain laughed contemptuously.

"If it does yer any good to think that way, go on an' think," he retorted. "But I reckon I know what I'm talkin' about."

Wild said no more.

The Indians now started to hold a consultation, and he caught enough from what they said to make him think that they really meant to burn him at the stake as a sacrifice, for they seemed to be of a tribe that had a peculiar sort of religion.

The result was that a few minutes later they turned toward the village, marching their prisoner along proudly.

They soon reached a beaten path, and as Wild walked as fast as they wanted him to, they were not long in arriving at the village.

Men who were old and young, squaws, half-grown bucks and papooses, all turned out to watch them as they passed by the tepees and log shanties.

Mongrel dogs barked and growled as the little procession went by.

Young Wild West took in all that lay within reach of his eyes, and when he saw that none of the Indians possessed anything like a firearm, he realized that what the old hunter had told was strictly true.

But there was not much consolation to be taken from this, since bows and arrows and spears and tomahawks can inflict wounds as well as firearms.

He knew very well that if his friends were going to rescue him they must do it by strategy, as it would be impossible for them to make an attack upon the Comanches and accomplish the desired purpose.

True, they might kill several of the redskins, but there was so many of them that they could not possibly win out.

One of the log shanties was rather larger than any of the rest and upon the top of it a pole was nailed, to which flaunted a bright colored banner.

That this was the place where the chief of the tribe lived, Wild had no doubt.

It was easy for him to guess that, for he knew so much about the manners and customs of the Indians, that it was as plain as an open book to him.

The Comanches paused before the shanty, and then Wild was faced toward the door, which was closed.

There was a short silence, and then two Indian boys came upon either side of the shanty and began beating upon the rude drums they carried.

At this the inhabitants of the village, who had gathered there in a hurry, began shifting their feet and moving their bodies in time to the rude music of the drums.

Presently they began jumping up and down, and then ensued something like a war-dance.

This lasted for perhaps five minutes, and then suddenly the door of the shanty opened, and out stepped the chief of the tribe, attired in a costume that was as gorgeous as it was barbarous.

Trousers that were made of bearskin adorned his lower extremities, and from about his neck hung long strings made up of the teeth and claws of animals.

Upon the top of his head was the head of a bull, and trailing from under this, all the way to the ground, was a long string of feathers, that were tied in all the colors of the rainbow.

His face was painted yellow, black and red, and in either hand he held a spear, the points of which seemed to be gold.

From the spear there flaunted the narrow strips of colored cloth, and on the whole the chief of the Comanche tribe showed up in true barbaric and fantastic shape.

Wild stood before him, cool and fearless, his long hair hanging over his shoulders and giving him the aspect of one who is not afraid of anything.

The dancing and drums had ceased the moment the chief appeared, and after looking at the prisoner for the space of a full minute, he gave a nod, as though he meant to greet the boy.

Wild quickly returned it and then said:

"How are you, chief? I'm sorry I couldn't come before you in better shape; but you see I didn't have my own way about it."

"Ugh!" came the response, in a guttural voice. "The paleface boy heap much brave."

"Oh," and Wild gave a nod of satisfaction. "I see you can talk the language of the palefaces, eh? Well, I'm mighty glad to know that. What is your name, chief?"

"Me Big Ox; me heap much big chief," was the reply,

in a tone of voice that showed the pride the Indian felt in saying it.

"Well, Big Ox, I reckon you had better let me go. I didn't come here of my own free will, you see. I was back on the hill over there, looking down this way. A big stone turned over with me and I came rolling down. I got loose in time to keep from falling over a precipice, and then, as I was trying to find a way to get back again, the half-breed scoundrel you have here, and some of your braves, caught me with a rope. If I came here to interfere with you of my own free will, it would be different. I reckon you don't want any trouble with the palefaces, so that the soldiers will come here after you, do you?"

The chief scowled at this, and then shaking his head, quickly answered:

"Big Ox no 'fraid of paleface soldiers. They no come here. The Comanches here all bear charmed lives. The palefaces can no hurt them with their guns. The Manitou of Fire is over Big Ox and his tribe. The palefaces can no harm them, and the Indians who no live here can no harm them. Big Ox and his tribe are the greatest of all who live."

"Well, I'm mighty glad to hear that," said Wild, in his cool and easy way. "Maybe you really think that, but I am afraid you will find you are mistaken, if you go too far. If you do harm me it won't be very long before you and your braves will be cleaned out, and you won't have any village left here. You can believe that scoundrel of a half-breed, you have here, if you like; but I want you to know that he is no good. It may be that he is a distant relative of yours, but that don't say that he is as good as you are. Anyhow, he is half paleface."

"Shet up, there, Young Wild West!" called out Rattler, sharply. "You stop runnin' me down, or something will happen ter yer afore you're ready for it."

"That's all right, Rattler. I know you're afraid that I might make the chief understand just what kind of a galoot you are. But I reckon he's got an idea about it, anyway. He seems to me to be a redskin who can study a man's face pretty well, and if he has looked you over carefully I have no doubt that he has come to the conclusion that you are no good."

"Shet up, I say!" roared Rattler, as he placed his hand on the butt of a revolver and stepped toward the boy.

Then it was that the chief turned sharply to him and called out something in his own tongue.

Wild understood what it meant, and he could not help smiling when he saw how quickly the half-breed stepped back.

The chief had told him to mind his own business.

But he decided to say nothing further just then, for he guessed that what he had said about the opinion the chief had of the villain was right.

"How many come with you, paleface boy?" Big Ox asked, as he fixed his eyes upon the face of the prisoner.

"There are nine of us, chief," was the reply. "Two are maidens, one is a young woman, two are men; there is another boy like myself, and two Chinamen. I am Young Wild West, and I take great pleasure in riding all around through the wildest parts of the country, looking up excitement. But I never yet have interfered with anyone unless they first interfered with me, or they were fighting

against the palefaces. I can easily see that you and your people are a peaceful lot. You don't want to make war on the palefaces, nor do you want to make war on anyone. You just want to be left alone here in your pleasant, little valley, so you can go ahead and live as your forefathers did. I can easily tell that, for what I see makes it plain to me. I want you to know that I did not come here to do harm to any of you. One of the men in my party was here not long ago, and when he told me about the great chief and his braves and people who lived here, I wanted to come and see them. I meant to go away again and not return. No harm was intended you. But the half-breed scoundrel has told you lies about me, and now you want to keep me a prisoner. I reckon you had better change your mind, Big Ox, and let me go."

The chief shook his head in the negative. He was very decisive about it, too, and when he told the braves who were standing close to him to go and tie him to a post that stood a short distance away before three or four of the tepees, Wild knew that it was useless to do any further arguing just then.

He gave a nod, as though he abided by the decision, and a few minutes later he was tied in a standing position to the post.

Then the chief waved his hand to those who had gathered about his shanty, and the result was that the crowd dispersed.

He stalked inside the rude structure, leaving the half-breed standing alone, his face a study, for it was evident that Rattler was not quite satisfied with the way things had turned out.

Meanwhile Young Wild West was left to his own meditations. He was tied securely to the stake, and without assistance, he could not hope to get free.

But he knew that his partners would find a way, so he remained cool and watched what was taking place around him.

The little children of the Comanches eyed him in an awesome way and the dogs came and sniffed at him.

Pretty soon a number of the oldest squaws in the Indian village formed themselves in a line and began walking around the boy, who had been tied to the stake under sentence of death.

CHAPTER VII.

CHARLIE, JIM AND HOP GO TO THE RESCUE.

Arietta quickly recovered from her fear and excitement when she saw that her dashing young lover had not been killed.

When she saw him standing upon his feet and waving to her she uttered a cry of joy, and then as he turned to work his way along in search of a place to climb to the top of the ridge, she started back for the camp to notify those there of what had happened.

It was over a hundred yards the two had covered in making their way through the long cleft, so neither her cry, or that which Wild uttered when he found himself going down the steep descent, had been heard.

"What's the matter, Arietta?" asked Jim Dart, as the girl came hurrying to the camp.

He could see that there was something wrong by the way the girl acted.

"Wild came near losing his life," she answered, quickly. "I guess we need some ropes. He fell down the steep hill. A big stone turned over with him as he stepped upon it."

"Are you sure he didn't git hurt, Arietta?" the scout, asked, quickly.

"Not much," replied the girl. "I saw him get upon his feet, and he waved his hands to me to let me know that he was all right. He didn't want to shout because he might be heard by someone in the valley, I suppose."

"Oh," and the scout breathed a sigh of relief.

The girl then related just how it had happened, and then followed by Charlie and Jim, each carrying a lariat, she led the way to the spot our hero had taken his impromptu drop from.

As they peered downward they could of course see nothing of the dashing young deadshot, or those who had captured him.

"He went along to the right," said the girl, pointing the way. "I suppose he is looking for a place to climb up here."

"Well, I reckon we had better go back, an' then go on up that way," the scout retorted.

"You go ahead, Charlie, and we will wait here," Dart suggested, quickly.

"All right," was the reply, and then Cheyenne Charlie hurried back through the narrow cleft, and reaching the top of the ridge again made his way along in the direction he thought the young deadshot had probably taken.

In a very few minutes the scout came to a point from which he could look down the valley, and as he did this he gave a start.

It happened that his eyes fell upon Wild and his captors, as they were leaving the trees and underbrush.

They were so far below him that it was folly to think of shooting those who had the boy a captive; but, anyhow, Charlie did not have his rifle with him.

He stood watching the boy as he was hurried along for the space of a minute or two, and then he was satisfied that the best thing to do was to go to the camp and get Jim Dart to accompany him down into the valley and try to rescue their dashing young leader.

Jim and Arietta had not returned when he got to the camp, so he told Hop to go and tell them to come back as quickly as possible.

Then he related what he had seen.

Both the old hunter and Anna and Eloise were dismayed when they learned that Wild had been made a captive by the Indians of the valley.

"That's mighty bad, I reckon," declared Texas Jake, shaking his head. "Yer say that half-breed was with 'em, eh?"

"Yes, I seen that galoot," Charlie answered. "You kin bet your life he's responsible for it all. It's too bad Wild had to go an' slip an' tumble down there. He never would have got him if it hadn't been for that, I reckon. Anyhow, they must have took him by surprise, or they couldn't have made him a prisoner without some of 'em goin' under. Wild ain't ther sort of feller to be ketched any kind of fashion, yer know."

"I reckon not," and the old hunter nodded. "But what are you goin' to do about it, Charlie?"

"I'm goin' to git Jim to go with me down there right away," was the reply. "I reckon we kin find a way to git there without bein' seen by them redskins. Of course it won't do to go to shootin' into 'em. We've got to go at it careful like. It's got to be done by strategy, as yer call it. But leave that to me an' Jim. We've done sich things afore. We'll jest git down there into that valley, an' then we'll sneak up to ther village. Once that's done I reckon we'll have to find some way to git Wild away from ther Comanches."

Just then Arietta and Hop came hurrying to the camp. Jim Dart was not far behind them.

When Jim and the girl heard that Wild had been captured their faces turned pale.

Charlie quickly told them all he had seen, and then spoke of his plan, which was to go down into the valley as he had already stated.

Of course Jim was willing to do this. He was always ready to do anything to help the boy he was proud to call his leader.

"We won't lose a minute, Charlie," as he quickly tightened his belt and looked at his weapons. "Come on."

"All right, Jim," the scout retorted. "I reckon we'll git Wild, all right. Arietta, you an' ther rest had better stay here till we come back."

"I will," was the reply, "unless I think you're staying too long."

Both knew what the girl meant by this. If she got it in her head to follow them and try to rescue Wild of her own accord, she would surely do it.

Arietta was one of the brave, determined sort, and an exception to her sex. She could do things that many veteran scouts could not accomplish.

As Charlie and Jim started off Hop, who had been busy taking something from his saddle-bags, started after them.

"Me go, too, so be," he called out.

"All right, heathen," the scout answered. "I forgot about you. I reckon you can be of some help. Maybe you kin do something to hold ther attention of ther Comanches while we're gittin' Wild away from 'em. Be sure you have got some of your fireworks with yer."

"Me gottee allee light, Misler Charlie," Hop retorted. "Me velly smartee Chineese. Me helpee gittee Misler Wild flee allee samee velly muchee quickee."

The Chinaman soon overtook them, and then they worked their way along under cover of the bushes until they found a sort of trail that ran down into the valley.

It was here that the half-breed had gone with the Indians he met, for they soon found the prints of his horse's hoofs, as well as the footprints of the Comanches.

It happened that there was a fringe of bushes at one side of this trail, while on the other rocks piled themselves in fantastic shapes.

"I reckon it ain't goin' ter be such hard work to git down here without bein' seen," observed the scout, shaking his head with satisfaction.

"That's right, Charlie," Dart answered. "We will be all right until we get down there, anyhow. Then we will have to be a little careful, since there is a long, level stretch of land between the patch of timber down there and the village."

"We makee outee allee light," spoke up Hop, in a voice

that betokened great confidence. "We velly soon findee outee where Misler Wild is, so be."

"I reckon we know about where he is now, Hop," the scout retorted. "The galoots was headin' straight for that village with him when I seen him last. It's most likely there's where they've took him."

"Lat allee light, Misler Charlie. We go to um village, too, len."

"Of course we will. There ain't no use in you sayin' that. That's what I said a little while ago, didn't I?"

"Lat light, Misler Charlie," and the Chinaman smiled blandly.

It seemed that Hop liked to tantalize the scout every time he got a chance, and that was why he was talking in that strain.

They might have kept the conversation going further, if Jim had not advised them to shut up.

"We want to be very careful, since we don't know but that there might be some of the redskins spying around here," he added.

This had the effect of silencing the scout and Hop, and then all three picked their way carefully down the rather steep descent.

But it was not so steep that horses could not go up and down, so it was easy for them to proceed on foot.

Carefully they worked their way to the bottom, and fifteen minutes after they left the camp they were down into the valley.

"A putty nice climate down here, I reckon," observed the scout, as he looked around and saw how everything was growing in such luxuriant fashion. "Nobody would have ever believed there was sich a place as this here among these mountains."

Jim Dart nodded to this, but said nothing.

"Well, come on," went on the scout. "Wild said we was not to shoot any of ther Comanches unless we had to, so I s'pose we'll have to foller out what he said."

"Certainly," Dart retorted. "Don't fire a shot unless it is absolutely necessary. That's Wild's orders, and they must be carried out. I reckon we can manage to rescue him without killing any of the Indians. Of course if that half-breed takes too strong a hand in the game he will get his medicine. But none of the Comanches must be shot unless they start in to try and kill us."

The scout nodded to this, and then Hop spoke up:

"Lat light. We no shootee um ledskins with um guns, so be. Me makee bigee fire-clacker shootee, and lat be allee light."

"Well, don't yer go to doin' that until we git ready for it," Charlie advised, shaking his finger at him.

"Me undelstand, Misler Charlie," Hop quickly answered. "Me no foollee; me velly smartee Chineese, so be."

Jim knew very well that he did understand perfectly, so he had nothing to say.

Hop had been too long traveling about the country with them for him not to know what should be done, and when it was time to do it.

They soon came to the end of the patch of woods, and then as they looked over a level plain the village of the Comanches showed up nearly a mile away.

Really it looked no closer to them now than it had from the top of the ridge.

"Well," said Dart, as he took in the situation at a glance, "I reckon it won't do for us to go straight for that place over there. We must cut off to the left and get to the other side of those trees over there. As you say, that grove runs directly to the lower side of the village. We will have to walk a mile or two in order to do this; but that's all right. I am confident that no harm has been done Wild, even though he was taken a prisoner."

"That's right, Jim," and the scout nodded to indicate that he was satisfied to do just as the boy suggested.

They started off to the left, making their way carefully along.

Every few yards they were forced to drop to the ground and crawl, so they might not be observed by anyone who might be looking that way from the village.

In this manner they continued until finally they got across the open space and reached the big grove that lay on the other side.

Once there they could proceed with less caution, and they hurried along at a trot now.

Hop brought up the rear, for he could not travel quite as fast as Young Wild West's two partners, though he had pretty good wind.

On they went, and soon the barking of the dogs of the Indian village sounded so close to them that they knew they had but a short distance further to go.

Two minutes later they were near the edge of the grove of trees, and then they saw they were right upon the village.

They became very cautious now, and working their way along, they soon reached a point from which they could see about all there was to be seen in the Comanche village.

It was just about this time that the older of the squaws formed into a line and began marching about the stake to which our hero was tied.

"The squaws is havin' a little parade all by themselves, I reckon," said Charlie, in a whisper. "They're doin' that to try an' worry Wild, I s'pose. But I reckon they ain't worryin' him much. He ain't ther kind what gits worried. He's always as cool as an icicle, no matter how hot things is around him."

Jim nodded to this, for he knew very well that every word of it was right.

The braves and bucks of the village did not appear to be paying much attention to their white prisoner just then, and the squaws were having it all to themselves.

"Say, Jim," said Charlie, suddenly. "I reckon if you could manage to sneak into one of them tepees an' git a blanket an' some of ther clothes of one of them squaws you could sorter j'in in with that procession for a minute or two, an' cut Wild loose. What do yer think about it?"

"A good idea, Charlie," was the quick reply. "The squaws don't seem to be paying much attention to anything but themselves. They're not even interfering with Wild. I had an idea that they meant to poke him with sharp sticks and try to torture him."

It was just then that a squaw who was so old and wrinkled that she might have been a hundred, came from one of the rude shanties near the tepees, and began pounding upon the one-headed drum she carried.

Those marching around in a circle promptly quickened their pace, and as she joined in the column, they all began singing a weird sort of chant.

"That means that Wild has been condemned to die, I reckon," said the scout, shrugging his shoulders. "I've heard how ther Comanches used ter do in old times when they had a prisoner what was to be burned at ther stake. They're sorter holdin' his funeral ceremony afore he's dead. Well, that's all right. I'd rather see 'em do it afore he's dead. It's a whole lot better for us, an' for Wild, too, I reckon."

Jim gave a nod, and then without a word he started to creep toward the nearest of the tepees.

Fortunately it was close to the fringe of trees and undergrowth. It really seemed to be a part of the valley that was not used for anything more than hunting game where our friends had come, and finding a narrow path that led between the trees and through the dense bushes, Jim worked his way along swiftly.

The circular procession continued, and while the chant was going on at its height, the boy took the chance of leaving the bushes, and then lying almost upon his stomach he wiggled along toward the tepee.

Two minutes later he had reached it, and quickly cutting a slit with his knife in the skin, he peered through.

The tepee was empty.

With a muttered exclamation of satisfaction, Jim Dart crept into the tepee.

"I reckon I stand a pretty good chance of doing it," he muttered, under his breath. "Here's just what I want to disguise myself with."

Sure enough, there were blankets and clothing such as were worn by the squaws of the village inside the little place.

Jim lost no time in taking what he wanted, and then he carefully crept out through the opening he had made in the back of the tepee.

It was just at that moment that the beating of the drum and the singing of the squaws came to a stop.

The boy could not see what was going on, so after waiting a few seconds, he moved around the tepee a little and then saw the chief of the tribe walking toward the assembled squaws.

It was no time for him to act now, so he crouched down and watched and waited.

The chief was still attired in his finery, and after walking up and down a few times, he spoke a word that caused the squaws to line up before him.

Then he began talking to them in his own language, and with a nod of satisfaction, Jim muttered:

"Now then, I reckon I'll see what I can do. It is going to be quite a risk, but that makes no difference. Wild has got to be rescued."

The boy arose to his feet, and with the blanket wrapped about him, so as to hide his face as much as possible, he stepped around toward the stake to which our hero was tied.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO ATTEMPTS TO RESCUE OUR HERO FAIL.

It was certainly a daring thing that Jim Dart proposed to do, but he was not the least bit afraid.

If he failed he made up his mind to take the consequences, that was all.

It was not the first time he had set himself to doing a dangerous and risky thing.

He heard the chief talking away at a great rate, and he understood enough of the Comanche language to understand that he was telling the squaws that the paleface boy was to be offered as a sacrifice to Manitou Fire, which was the god the tribe seemed to worship.

"Fire worshippers, eh?" thought Jim. "I didn't know there were any of them among the Comanches. But there is nothing strange about it, I suppose. I'll bet that Texas Jake is mistaken in his idea that the redskins here have lived here for generations. They are probably nothing more than a crowd of fanatics, who have come here because the rest of their race they mingled with did not believe as they do. But I reckon that Wild will not be offered as a sacrifice to the Fire God, just the same. If I don't set him free inside of five minutes I'll miss my guess, that's all."

Big Ox, the Comanche chief, grew eloquent as he talked to the old squaws, and all seemed to be listening to him intently.

Wrapped in the blanket, Jim Dart moved slowly around into full view of the chief, and then he started forward, as though he mean to join the throng.

No one seemed to pay any attention to him, so he slowly moved toward the stake to which our hero was tied.

He reached out and was just about to pull a knife from under the blanket to sever the bonds, when a brave, who was standing behind one of the tepees, and out of sight of Jim, suddenly leaped forward and flung the boy to the ground.

He uttered a shout as he did this, and becoming entangled in the blanket Dart could not pull his gun.

The result was that in less than ten seconds he was in the power of the Comanches.

Wild turned and saw who it was as the blanket was torn from the struggling boy, and he could not help feeling a little discouraged.

He knew that a daring attempt to rescue him had been made.

It had failed, too, and that meant that his chances of getting away were growing less.

But Cheyenne Charlie was still somewhere about, he had no doubt, and if he could not succeed, Arietta, or perhaps Hop, might.

Of course, he only had the four just mentioned to depend upon.

"Take it easy, Jim," he called out. "They've got you, and that is all there is to it. But don't have any idea they are going to kill either of us. Bix Ox, the great chief of the Comanches is not that sort of a fellow. I reckon he is simply trying to scare me a little, and when he gets through he will let us both go. I am glad to know that you made such a good try to set me free, however. It's all right. Just keep cool."

The boy spoke in a loud tone of voice, and the chief, as well as the rest of those standing about, heard and understood him.

Jim was quickly disarmed and lifted upon his feet.

But instead of tying him to the stake with Young Wild West, the chief gave orders for him to be placed in the log shanty he made his headquarters.

This was somewhat surprising to both boys, since it

would seem that they would be placed together, and offered up as a double sacrifice to the Manitou of Fire, as the Indians called their Fire God.

Jim submitted quietly, and he was soon bound hand and foot and thrust into a dark corner of a little room at one end of the log structure.

Not only this was done, but the chief gave orders that a search should be made about the outskirts of the village.

"There may be more of the palefaces about," he said, in his own language. "Go look for them."

But Charlie and Hop, having seen how Jim fared, took the precaution to hide themselves that very moment. They did not run away from the vicinity, however, as they knew they would simply be sure of being caught if they did.

Instead, they crept right into the village and hid behind the chief's quarters.

The bushes were very thick in the rear of the log shanty, so they lay quietly there until the search had been made and the Indians returned, declaring that there were no more of the palefaces about.

Neither of them had remained long enough on the watch to see what had been done with Dart, and they did not know that the boy was in that very shanty.

But they did know that it was the dwelling place of the chief, for the gorgeous banner that was nailed to it indicated that plainly.

Another thing, they had seen him emerge from it while the squaws were marching about Wild in a circle.

As soon as they thought the danger of their being discovered was over, Charlie took a notion to try and work his way inside the shanty.

He saw that one of the logs was comparatively rotten and that it was loose at one end.

If he could succeed in removing that a part of the way it would be easy to pull another aside, and then crawl into the building.

With his knife he started picking away at the log, and seeing what he was up to, the Chinamen joined in.

The result was that in a very few minutes the log, which was about six feet in length, was removed entirely, though the scout insisted on pushing back one end of it, so it might be closed very quickly, if they had occasion to do it.

Then, as he started to try and dislodge the one that was above it, a whispered voice suddenly sounded upon his ears.

"Hello, Charlie," were the words he heard.

The scout gave a start, for he instantly recognized the voice as belonging to Jim Dart.

Hop heard it, also, and he gave a nod of delight, while his yellow face fairly glowed with pleasure.

Cheyenne Charlie worked faster now. He felt that some force unknown to him had made him think of dislodging the log.

Five minutes later he pulled the end of the next log from the corner and forced it around a few feet.

Then he dropped low to the ground and thrust his head and shoulders through the opening.

There lay Jim in the opposite corner, bound hand and foot.

The moment he saw the face of the scout Dart undertook to roll toward him.

But he was bound to make more or less noise in doing

this, so Charlie motioned with his hand for him to keep still.

It was much easier for the scout to proceed in a noiseless manner than for the helpless boy to roll that way.

The result was that Charlie quickly reached him and severed the bonds.

"Git out through that hole," he whispered, as he pointed to the opening. "Hop is there."

Jim lost no time in obeying, but Charlie decided to remain in the shanty a while. His curiosity was aroused sufficiently to cause him to have the desire to look around the shanty before he left it.

He soon found that there were but two rooms to the shanty, and that this one was simply a sort of store-room, though a very small one, at that.

There was no window to it, but there was enough light admitted through the chinks between the logs.

In the room were several old barrels and boxes, which contained articles that were mostly rubbish.

The scout soon satisfied himself that there was nothing there that was worth while taking, so he tried the door that opened into the other part of the shanty. But this was barred on the other side, the chief having made sure that Jim could not escape, even if he should happen to get his hands free.

"All right," muttered the scout, nodding with satisfaction. "I reckon when ther old galoot comes to look for his other prisoner he won't find him. Now then, we've got to find a way to git Wild free. It's gettin' along well in ther afternoon, an' I reckon we want ter git him afore night comes on. Jest like as not ther Comanches will take a notion to roast him after ther sun goes down."

He made his way back to the opening, and dropping up on his stomach, crept outside.

Jim and Hop were there waiting for him.

"What are you going to do now, Charlie?" Jim asked, in a low whisper.

"I don't jest know, Jim," was the reply. "But I reckon we'd better put these two logs back in ther place as well as we kin."

It did not take them long to do this, and then the scout and Dart looked at each other in silence, while Hop watched them intently.

None of the three knew just what to do. They all knew that there was no possible chance of either of them creeping up to where the young deadshot was tied to the stake. They would be discovered before they got half the distance, even though the Indians were not watching at the time.

As we have stated, the stake was located before three or four of the tepees that were clustered together, and though it was not in sight of the door of the chief's headquarters, it was but a short distance away—perhaps thirty feet.

They waited there for fully ten minutes after Charlie came out of the log shanty, and then Hop looked at his two companions, and said:

"Maybe me makee bigee timee on lat side with um fire-clackers, and when um ledskins comee over lere to see whatee mattee is you gittee um chance to cuttee Misler Wild flee, so be."

The eyes of the scout brightened when he heard this,

while Jim Dart could not help thinking it was a very good plan.

But the Chinaman would be taking a big risk in doing it, he knew.

"They'll most likely catch you, Hop," he said, shaking his head. "If you draw them that way they will be pretty sure to see you when you run."

"Lat allee light," declared the Chinaman, the vestige of a smile playing about his lips. "Me see um horse um half-breed bling here, so be. Um horses light over lere, tied to um flee. Me gettee 'lound lere velly muchee quickee, and me havee um horse allee light, and when me makee two, thlee fire-clackers go bang! me allee samee lun to um horse and gettee on him back velly muchee quickee. Me gettee 'way velly muchee bettee lan you."

"Well, if we can get Wild free I reckon we won't be long in gittin' away," declared the scout, shaking his head, and looking very determined. "We kin all run about as fast as them redskins, I reckon. If that half-breed galoot starts ter foller us he's goin' ter git a bullet from me."

"Lat light, Misler Charlie. Now len, you waitee till me gittee 'lound lere by lat big tlee."

Hop pointed out the tree he referred to, and when Jim gave his consent to the plan he slipped quietly away into the bushes.

The Indians were not very active in the camp, since they had no doubt come to the conclusion that there were no more of the palefaces near at hand.

The squaws had dispersed to their various tepees and shanties, and there were only probably a dozen braves gathered in the near vicinity to Wild.

Hop moved off, and was soon lost to view by Charlie and Jim.

Then, after what seemed to be a very long wait, they caught sight of something moving near the foot of a tree.

The next minute a head was slowly raised, and then they knew that the clever Chinese was there.

"Now then, Jim, git ready for a rush," said the scout, as he gripped the hundle of his hunting knife. "But—hold on a minute. I reckon you had better stay right here and be ready to run. I reckon I kin do it better without you. You ain't got nothin' to shoot with in case it needs to be done. You stand ready ter run when you hear Hop start off his fire-crackers. I'll do ther rest."

The words were scarcely out of the scout's mouth when a loud report rang out.

It was quickly followed by another, and then another. Instantly that portion of the Indian village was in a commotion.

The Comanches hastened for the spot where the smoke was rising, not knowing what had happened.

Meanwhile Charlie was running as fast as he could around behind the tepees.

Just as he was within a dozen feet of the stake to which our hero was tied, his foot caught upon the root of a tree and he fell flat upon his stomach.

Before he could get upon his feet a squaw ran out of one of the tepees and fell upon him, doing her best to hold him down, while she uttered shrill cries for help.

Exasperated at his mishap, the scout flung aside the screaming squaw and got upon his feet.

But some of the Comanches had been closer by than he

expected, and the next instant he saw a dozen or more rushing toward him with uplifted spears.

"Whoopee! Wow, wow, wow!" yelled the scout, for his fighting blood was now up.

Then he drew his revolvers.

"Hold on, Charlie!" called out Wild, from the stake. "Don't shoot. Run for it."

"All right, Wild," was the quick reply, and then up-setting the squaw, who was making another attack upon him, Charlie bounded away into the bushes.

CHAPTER IX.

ARIETTA SETS OUT TO RESCUE WILD.

Those at the camp upon the ridge waited patiently for the return of those who had set out to liberate Young Wild West.

When half an hour passed by Arietta became uneasy.

She went back and forth through the cleft in the ridge several times, and each time she was unable to see anything at the village that would indicate that a success had been made by those who had started for it.

When she came back the last time she nodded to Anna and Eloise and exclaimed:

"I am going down there into the valley. I'm afraid Charlie and Jim, as well as Hop, have been unable to do anything. But I will save Wild, if no one else can."

"Don't go, Arietta," said the scout's wife, pleadingly. "You know very well that Charlie and Jim will do their level best. You will simply be running into more danger if you should go down there."

"I don't mind the danger," was the reply. "I hardly think these Indians would harm a girl. They might make me a prisoner, if they get the chance, but I'll see to it that they don't have the chance."

Eloise tried to dissuade her, too, but it was of no use.

Then Texas Jake shook his head and said:

"You're makin' a mistake, gal. What show would you have with a lot of Injuns? They would see yer afore yer could get anywheres near Wild. You had better stay right here an' wait till them what went to look for you comes back. Maybe he'll come back with 'em. I sorter think that way, anyhow."

"Well, I don't," was the rather curt reply of the girl. "I have made up my mind to go down there, and I am going. If I get into trouble it will be my own fault."

Texas Jake shrugged his shoulders and said no more.

Picking up her rifle, Arietta at once set out.

She took the same direction that the scout, Jim and Hop had taken, and she was not long in striking the trail that led down into the valley.

When the hunter declared that she would stand little show in getting there without being seen he made a mistake, for the girl was quite up in woodcraft, and she worked her way along as cautiously as an Indian scout might have done.

Before she was half way down she heard the reports of the crackers Hop set off, and then she knew that the Chinaman must be at work.

A hope sprung in her breast, for it occurred to her that she might soon see her dashing young lover running toward her with the Indians in pursuit.

She gripped her rifle tightly, which meant that she would stand ready to use it if it became necessary.

Then she proceeded on down the hill, dodging along behind the rocks, and creeping close to the ground when it was necessary.

A few minutes later she saw a horse and rider coming at a swift pace less than a quarter of a mile distant.

It was Hop, as she could readily see.

Then it was that the girl's face paled. It struck her right away that the attempt to rescue Wild had failed, and that probably Charlie and Jim had been caught by the Comanches.

Waiting behind a clump of bushes she watched the approaching Chinaman.

As he drew near her she stepped out into view and threw up her hand.

"Hip hi!" called out the Chinaman, excitedly. "Me allee samee gittee 'way velly muchee quickee. Pletty soonce you see Misler Wild and Misler Charlie and Misler Jim come velly muchee fastee. No more horses lere, so ley havee lun on foot."

Hop really thought that his plan had been carried out to perfection, for he had not taken the time to see what had happened after he set off the last of the crackers.

Arietta's hope arose again. She, too, thought it very likely that what Hop said would soon be proved correct.

Strange to say, the Comanches had not given chase to the Chinaman.

It might have been that when the scout was discovered by the old squaw that they had been attracted in that direction, and had not seen him take his departure with the horse.

But anyhow, he had got that far through the valley without being pursued.

"So there are no more horses in the village, eh, Hop?" Arietta asked. "That means that the tribe don't use horses. Well, that is what Wild said was the case when we looked down upon it from above. It's a good thing they have no horses, perhaps, for that will make it all the better for us to get away when we get ready to leave."

"Lat light, Missee Alietta," answered the Chinaman, who had kept a tight hold upon the rein of the horse, so it could not get away from him.

The two waited for fully ten minutes, and then as they saw no one coming it occurred to both of them that something had gone wrong.

"Maybe Misler Charlie and Misler Jim no gettee Misler Wild flee, so be," said Hop, shaking his head. "Me no undelstand, Missee Alietta."

"I guess they made a failure of it, Hop," the girl answered, shaking her head, sadly.

But the next minute her eyes flashed and she brightened up wonderfully.

"If they have made a failure of it, I will see what I can do," she declared.

"Allee light, Missee Alietta. Me helpee you velly muchee, so be. Me velly smartee Chineee. Me makee um ledskins allee samee feelee velly muchee sickee. Me gottee plenty more fireclackers."

"Well, if you want to help me, Hop, just go along with me. We will go around to the woods over there, and then we won't be seen. I'll get on the horse with you."

Hop nodded, and promptly assisted her to mount.

Then he clambered up behind her, and they set out, taking a roundabout course, which was about the same that had been followed by Wild's partners and the Chinaman when they first set out to try and rescue him.

It was a daring piece of work for the girl, but she never once thought of the danger.

Her heart was set upon rescuing her dashing young lover, and she was ready to fight until it was accomplished, no matter what the odds were against her.

When they got around behind the strip of woods the horse was put to a faster gait, and the result was that they rapidly neared the Indian village.

Just as Arietta decided that it was best to bring the horse down to a walk, so the hoof-beats might not be heard by the Indians, a man suddenly sprang from the bushes, holding a leveled revolver in his hand.

It was Rattler, the half-breed.

"A-ha!" he exclaimed, a fiendish smile showing on his ugly face. "I've been watching yer, gal. So you have come right ter me, have yer? You jest make one little cry an' I'll put a bullet through you, even if I like yer a whole lot. Keep your mouth shut, too, heathen. I feel jest in ther humor to shoot yer full of holes, anyhow."

Then the villain quickly seized the bridle rein with his left hand, but did not turn his revolver away from the girl.

Though taken completely by surprise, Arietta quickly recovered herself and made out that she was very much frightened.

Hop really was very much frightened, but he quickly recovered, too, for the coolness the girl displayed, though she was acting as though she was in fear, nerved him for what might chance to happen.

Hop knew well the way Arietta did business, and when she did not try to shoot the scoundrel he felt certain that she was simply trying to deceive him and thus gain time.

This was just what the girl was trying to do.

"Don't shoot," she said, putting up her hand as though to ward off a bullet. "Have pity on me, please. I have come to save Young Wild West. If there is the least spark of a man about you you will help me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the half-breed. "You're a mighty putty gal, I reckon. So yer want to save Young Wild West's life, do you? Well, gal, I'll tell yer how it kin be done. You jest give me a nice kiss from them ruby lips of yours an' I'll see to it that ther boy is set free. How does that strike you?"

"Lat velly goodee, so be," spoke up Hop, from behind the girl.

"Nobody's askin' your opinion, heathen. You shet up. No matter if Young Wild West does git saved, I'm goin' to fill you full of holes. You ain't goin' ter git away from here alive, that's sartin."

"Allee light, Mislerr Lattler," said the Chinaman, who was now bound to keep up his coolness, for he felt somehow that Arietta was soon going to give the villain the surprise of his life.

"I—I don't want you to kiss me, sir," Arietta answered, as though she was trembling with fear, though the fact was that she could hardly keep from reaching over and knocking the weapon from his hand.

That was what she meant to do, but he was hardly near enough for the purpose.

But what she said had the effect of giving her the chance, for Rattler took a couple of steps closer to her.

"If I let you kiss me will you surely set Young Wild West free?" she asked.

"I sartinly will, gal," lied the scoundrel, his eyes sparkling with a strange glitter.

At the same time he unconsciously lowered his revolver, no doubt thinking that the girl had given in.

Then it was that he received a surprise.

A quick blow from the girl's left hand sent the weapon from his grasp, and then swinging her rifle around as hard as she could, she landed a blow upon his head that sent him staggering upon the ground.

In a twinkling Arietta leaped from the horse and dealt the villain a second blow, which rendered him unconscious.

"Lat pletty good, Missee Alietta," declared Hop, as he slipped from the back of the horse and lost no time in tying the man's hands. "Me fixee him uppee allee samee velly muchee quicke."

Then Hop gave the unconscious man a slap in the face, and then proceeded to bind and gag him.

Arietta watched him until he had finished his task, and then she quietly tied the horse to a tree, and said:

"Now then, Hop, we will go on and save Wild."

CHAPTER X.

ARIETTA DARING DEATH.

Cheyenne Charlie ran for his life.

But he did not mean to be caught if he could possibly prevent it.

He did not run around to where he had left Jim, for he really had not the time to do it. He took to the woods, and the moment he reached a tree that was easy to climb he at once swung himself into the branches and went up like a cat.

One thing, the scout had not dropped his rifle when he fell and the squaw perched upon him.

He had held fast to that, knowing that it might be possible that he would have to use it before long.

Up the tree he went, taking the weapon with him.

It so happened that the bushes were so dense right at the edge of the collection of huts and tepees that none of the Indians had seen him climb the tree.

But he knew if they continued the search very long they would be sure to find him there.

However, he was willing to run the chances of being discovered.

The only one he had to fear was the half-breed, who was armed with a rifle and revolver.

Charlie had barely got himself snugly concealed near the top of the tree, which was a close-limbed fir, when he heard several of the redskins coming.

He looked down and soon was able to see their forms as they ran about in search of the paleface who had failed to rescue Young Wild West.

None of them looked up at the trees, and when Charlie saw this a grim smile played about his lips.

"I reckon they think I've gone right on," he muttered.

"Well, that's all right. Let 'em think that way. I'll git Wild yet, see if I don't."

For the next ten minutes the Indians continued to make a search of the woods, and then Charlie saw them coming back to the village.

"One thing about them red galoots, they don't go very far when a feller gits away, anyhow," he thought. "Why, it would be mighty easy ter git away from 'em, even if a feller kept right on runnin'. All he would have to do would be ter keep far enough ahead so them arrows couldn't reach him. I reckon I kin run as fast as any Comanche in that crowd, anyhow. But this tree is good enough a place for me jest now. I'll wait till things sorter git quieted down, an' then I'll git down to ther ground an' look around for Jim. I reckon ther heathen must have got away, all right, 'cause I ain't heard nothin' of him."

Five minutes later not an Indian could be seen by the scout, though he could hear the sounds of their voices in the village.

Just as he was thinking of descending the tree he heard footsteps coming close to it.

Carefully pushing aside the branches that concealed him from the view of anyone upon the ground, the scout peered downward.

Then he saw a man making his way along in a skulking fashion.

It was Rattler, the half-breed.

"Great gimlets!" exclaimed the scout, under his breath. "If I didn't promise Wild I wouldn't do it, I'd certainly take a shot at that galoot. I know it would bring ther Comanches herè in a jiffy, but I wouldn't care for that. That half-breed hadn't oughter be allowed to live another minute. I wonder what he's up ter, anyway. He seems ter be sneak-in' along as though he's after somethin'. I reckon I'll git down and foller him."

By the time Charlie descended to the ground Rattler was out of sight.

But he noticed that the villain was moving away from the Indian village, and that meant that it would be pretty safe for him to follow him.

There were so many foot-prints in the soft ground of the wood that it was difficult to pick out the tracks the half-breed had made.

But Charlie went on in the direction he had seen him last, and in two or three minutes he found where he had turned straight away from the village, toward the spot where our friends were camped upon the ridge.

Rattler wore heavy boots, while the Comanches all used moccasins for a footgear.

It was easy for Charlie to tell that the scoundrel had been walking when he made the tracks, so he proceeded along cautiously.

Since Wild had told him he must not shoot the half-breed unless it was absolutely necessary, he had decided to try and make him a prisoner.

In doing this he did not want to have him utter a shout, so the attention of the Indians might be attracted.

Hence it was necessary for him to proceed with the utmost caution, since he did not know how close he might be to his man.

Charlie did not have to go very far before he heard the unmistakable sounds of whispered voices.

He came to a halt at once and listened.

Suddenly he gave a start, while his eyes sparkled with delight.

The voices he heard were those of Arietta and Hop Wah. "Great gimlets!" he exclaimed, half aloud. "What are they doin' here?"

Pushing his way through the bushes, he came upon Young Wild West's sweetheart and the clever Chinaman just as they were about to start toward the Indian village, after having made Rattler a prisoner.

"Hello, Arietta!" said the scout, in a low tone of voice. "What are you doin' here?"

"Why, it's Charlie!" the girl exclaimed. "You came a little too late to be of any help to me, I guess. See that fellow lying there?"

Arietta pointed to the helpless scoundrel, who was now coming to from the effects of the blows he had received.

Charlie looked at the half breed and then gave a nod of satisfaction.

"So you have got him, eh? Well, Arietta, I was after him, I reckon. I'll jest see if he's tied good. Don't be in any hurry about gittin' over there to ther village. It will be better if you let ther Injuns sorter git quieted down a bit."

Arietta saw the wisdom of this, so she waited until the scout had made an examination of the knots Hop had made in the ropes when he bound Rattler.

"You made a pretty good job of it, Hop," the scout declared. "But I reckon I'll take another turn about ther galoot's neck. I'll jest make a nice little noose for it, an' then swing ther end of ther rope over that limb up there."

He gave a chuckle as he proceeded to do this, and then Arietta said:

"You're not going to hang him, Charlie?"

"No, not jest now," was the reply. "But it sorter does me good to make preparations, you know."

"Well, I know very well Wild won't permit anything like that. I know he is a very bad man, but he must not be hanged."

"All right, Arietta. I ain't goin' ter hang him. As I jest said, I'm only makin' preparations. You can't tell but that some of ther Comanches might take a notion to take hold of ther rope an' give it a yank, if they should happen to come along here an' see him layin' there. I don't think ther old chief has much of an opinion of him, anyhow."

"All right, Charlie. Now let us go to rescue Wild."

"That's easier said than done, I reckon," and Charlie shook his head, while an expression of doubt came over his face.

"I'll do it," declared the girl, her eyes flashing. "Just let me see where he is and I will walk straight up and cut him loose. I am confident that the Comanches will not dare to kill me, and I am going to take the risk. They will be surprised if I do such a thing, and before they can recover themselves Wild can get away. It will be much easier for me to escape than it would be if one of you attempted it."

"Maybe your're right, Arietta," but the scout shrugged his shoulders and shook his head as though he hardly believed it. "We've tried it twice now, but we've made a miss of it."

Then he quickly told her of the attempts to rescue Wild and what had happened after that.

But Arietta paid no attention. She started boldly for the Comanche village, Charlie and Hop following her.

Arietta kept on leading until they were very close to the fringe of bushes at the edge of the village.

Then Charlie hastened to overtake her.

"I reckon if you're goin' ter do what you said you would, Arietta, you had better come this way. I'll take yer right behind ther log shanty that ther chief uses for his headquarters. There's where we left Jim, an' I reckon he must be there yet. Ther chances are when he found out that I made a failure of it he crawled inside ther shanty. There's a couple of logs loose, yer know."

"All right," answered the girl, in a whisper.

She permitted him to conduct her to the rear of the shanty, and when Charlie dropped to the ground and crept along, she did the same.

Hop came along a few yards behind of his own accord.

The moment Arietta reached the shanty she turned to the scout and said:

"You stay here; I'm going to walk right out there in full view of the Indians. I will have my knife ready, and no matter what they say to me I will walk straight to Wild and cut him free!"

"All right," and the scout nodded. "You kin bet your life I'll be standin' ready with my rifle to knock over ther first redskins what interferes with you. I can't help what Wild says about shootin'; it seems to me that it's got to come mighty quick."

"Well, don't you shoot until you have to, Charlie."

With that the girl started deliberately around the shanty and walked out into the full view of a number of braves who were gathered about the stake that Young Wild West was bound to.

The girl took in the situation at a glance.

Half-a-dozen of the braves stood near Wild, as though guarding him, each with a bow and arrow.

The moment they saw the girl coming forward, knife in hand, they divined her intention.

Instantly the bow-strings were pulled back and six arrows were aimed at the brave girl.

"Paleface girl stop, or she die!" exclaimed one of them, in guttural tones. "She must not go to the paleface boy. He has got to die!"

Heedless of the fact that the Comanche braves stood ready to let their arrows fly at her, Arietta bounded forward, knife in hand.

"I'll save you, Wild!" she cried.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

In spite of the unsuccessful attempts of his friends to rescue him, Young Wild West had remained very patient.

Jim had failed, and so had Charlie, but he knew that something must happen in his favor before long.

While he thought that Jim was a captive in the shanty he did not fear the outcome, since he had seen enough of the Comanches to convince him that they were not over careful in keeping a watch.

He had seen Rattler, the half-breed, leaving the village

after the braves came back and reported that they could not find the paleface who had tried to save him, and he wondered what the scoundrel was up to.

After waiting some little time what was the young dead-shot's surprise to see his sweetheart step into view and walk rapidly toward him, knife in hand.

The old chief had stationed six of the braves to guard him with their bows and arrows, and when he saw Arietta coming Wild could not help uttering an exclamation of joy.

But when he saw the braves bend their bows and point the arrows at the girl his face turned pale.

If the six braves followed the instructions of their chief they would certainly shoot the girl down, if she came close enough to use her knife upon the ropes that bound him to the stake.

"Don't come any nearer, Et," he called out, quickly. "They'll surely send the arrows into your body. The chief instructed them to shoot the first one who came to interfere with me. Stop where you are. Maybe you can do better by talking it over with the chief."

But the brave girl simply shook her head.

With the arrow-heads pointed directly at her, Arietta hastened to the side of her dashing young lover.

Warning exclamations came from the Indians and cries sounded from others as they came hurrying to the spot.

But the brave girl never once looked behind her.

With a quick stroke of her knife, she severed the rope that held the boy to the stake.

Two or three more slashes, and Wild was free.

"They dare not shoot me, Wild!" she exclaimed. "I knew it, or I would not have dared to do it."

Just then Big Ox, the chief, came hurrying to the scene.

He was without his gaudy garments now, and looked very much like a plain, ordinary Comanche.

He called out sharply in his own tongue, and the result was that the Indians who held the bows instantly let them relax and withdrew the arrows.

"The paleface maiden is very brave!" the chief exclaimed, as he turned and looked admiringly at her. "She has dared death. Big Ox stood and saw her walk right up to the boy she loves and cut him loose, when she knew that death was staring her in the face. The paleface maiden is very brave. She can take Young Wild West with her and leave the village of the Comanches."

This was rather unexpected, both to Wild and Arietta.

But it was a big relief to them to hear the words.

"Thank you, chief," the girl answered, as soon as she could find the use of her tongue. "I knew the Comanches in the valley here were not bad. Something told me that, and that is why I did not fear the arrows that were pointed at me."

Wild gave a nod of approval at what his sweetheart said, and then he calmly walked over and picked up his weapons, which were lying near one of the tepees.

He coolly placed his revolvers in the holsters, and then thrust his hunting knife into the sheath.

Next he picked up his rifle, and slung it over his shoulder, which plainly told the Comanches that he was not going to do any shooting just then.

"Big Ox," said he, putting out his hand, "I reckon you and I had better shake."

"Ugh!" exclaimed the chief, as he reached out and took the hand of the boy. "Young Wild West heap much brave. The paleface maiden very much brave girl. She dared death to save Young Wild West. Big Ox a big chief, but he knows what is good and what is brave."

"Well," said Wild, as he smiled and nodded to the chief, "I told you when you caught me that we did not come here to do any harm to you or your people. We heard of the village here, and we wanted to look at it. Now that we have seen it, I suppose we can go away. But if you don't mind, we would like to take the boy you captured while he was trying to free me, given his liberty."

"The palefaces shall all go free; come with me," said the chief.

Wild and Arietta followed him to the log shanty, the crowd of braves and squaws that had gathered, coming along after them.

The old chief opened the door of his shanty, and then stepping inside, went to one that was barred and opened that.

He had scarcely done so when out stepped Hop Wah.

The old chief gave a start and jumped back.

"Velly nicee day, so be," said Hop, blandly.

When Arietta went on around the shanty Charlie had quickly found that Jim Dart was inside it.

The result was that he quickly told him what was up, and then Dart lost no time in coming out.

Then all three listened and watched to see what would happen.

When they found that Arietta had succeeded their joy knew no bounds; but when they heard the chief say that Young Wild West was to go free, Hop Wah began to dance.

"Me go inside um shanty, so be," he declared, suddenly. "Pletty soonee Misler Wild makee um chief comee to takee Misler Jim outee, and len he find me lere. Lat be allee samee velly nicee magic tlick."

The Chinaman had done just as he declared he would do, and neither Charlie nor Jim tried to stop him.

As he stepped out and remarked that it was a very nice day the Comanches looked at each other in mute surprise.

They could not understand how it was that the Chinaman could come from the room in the shanty.

But Wild quickly explained things to the chief and those who could understand English.

Big Ox was quite an intelligent Indian, and a few minutes later all our friends were gathered before his shanty.

Then it was that Arietta told what the half-breed had done, and how he had been made a prisoner by her, with the assistance of the Chinaman.

The result was that the chief ordered his braves to go and find the villain and deal with him summarily.

"Let me go with 'em, chief," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "I got everything fixed for ther galoot."

Young Wild West nodded, so Charlie started off with fully forty Indians after him.

What the scout told them to do when they found the helpless scoundrel can readily be imagined by the reader.

Anyhow, Charlie returned fifteen minutes later, and looking at the chief, said:

"I reckon there won't be no further trouble from that galoot. He's hangin' ter a tree back there."

It was wonderful to see how kindly the Comanches took to our friends after that.

Big Ox invited them to stay at the village for a few days, so Hop was sent up to the camp on the ridge and all hands came down there.

When the Indians found that our friends had so many trinkets and pieces of calico and ribbons with them their delight knew no bounds.

They wanted these things, of course, and as they had plenty of gold dust and nuggets, some very profitable trading was done.

Before they left on the third day after their arrival Wild thought it would be a good idea to let Hop give an entertainment for the benefit of the Indians.

He told the chief about it, and the result was that word was sent all over the village for the populace to gather in the square near where the stake Young Wild West had been bound to, after he had been caught by the Comanches, at a certain time.

The Indians, old and young, lost no time in gathering there, and then Hop gave them an exhibition, such as they had never seen or dreamed of.

"Lis velly nicee place, so be," the Chinaman observed, as the chief led him over before his headquarters and permitted him to sit at his right side upon a gorgeous blanket. "Me likee stay here allee timee, but me gottee go with Young Wild West."

Then he treated the chief to a cigar, which was not one of the kind he used to trick people with, and that made him more solid than ever.

With the half-breed out of the way our friends had nothing further to fear, so the next morning they bade adieu to the Comanches and set out for some other part of the country, where they might find excitement and adventure.

Texas Jake parted company with them a few miles from the valley, he declaring that he was going on with his hunting, as he could not think of giving up what he had been doing all his life.

"Well," said Wild, "I was caught by the Comanches, all right, and if it had not been that Arietta dared death, the chances are that things would have turned out differently. But it is all right, boys. All sorts of things happen to us, it seems, and I reckon we are good for a whole lot of adventures yet."

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST SHOWING UP A SHERIFF; OR, THE RIGHT MAN ON THE WRONG TRAIL," which will be the next number (382) of "Wild West Weekly."

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SOME GOOD ARTICLES.

The Department of Agriculture is taking a census of the birds of the United States, and even before its completion is able to estimate that there are 1,414,000,000 or thereabouts. The census is also for the purpose of finding out what birds help and what birds harm the crops, with a view to diminishing the injurious ones and increasing the insect-eating varieties.

The earliest railway tickets differed entirely from those now in use. The booking clerk was furnished with a volume, the pages of which were divided down the center by a perforated line, the outside half of each page was again divided into slips about four inches long by an inch and three-quarters in width, on each of which was printed the name of the issuing station; spaces were provided in which the clerk had to write the destination, passenger's name, date of issue and the time the train was due to depart. One of these slips, duly filled in, was detached from the book and handed over to each would-be passenger in exchange for his fare. The traveler, having thus obtained his ticket, was passed on to the guard of the train by which he desired to travel. This official was provided with a kind of waybill on which he entered particulars of all his passengers in much the same way that a parcel is served nowadays. Incidentally the similarity of treatment did not always end there, the third class passengers had to travel in an open carriage, frequently nothing more than a goods truck attached to a train which carried both passengers and goods, more or less indiscriminately.

With what amazement would you regard a person who had a million ancestors; yet by looking in a mirror you can behold the very individual yourself! Now, we each had two parents, a father and a mother, both of whom had two parents. Thus, on this principle, and assuming there has been no intermarriage of relations, a person who has had four grandparents has had eight great-grandparents. And our lineal ancestors during twenty generations number 1,048,576. So if these ancestors were all living, they would be sufficient to populate a large city. Work the matter out, and you will find that the first generation consists of 2, the second of 4, the third of 8, the fourth of 16, the fifth of 32, the sixth of 64, the seventh of 128, the eighth of 256, the ninth of 512, the tenth of 1,024, the eleventh of 2,048, the twelfth of 4,096, the thirteenth of 8,192, the fourteenth of 16,384, the fifteenth of 32,768, the sixteenth of 65,536, the seventeenth of 131,072, the eighteenth of 262,144, the nineteenth of 524,288, and the twentieth of 1,048,576. And this does not take into account uncles and aunts.

Travelers tell us that the wolves of Mexico have a strange way of catching the wild horses. These horses have great speed. It is almost impossible for a single cowboy to catch one. The cowboys, when they wish to run them down, have relays of pursuers. First one set of cowboys will chase the horses, then another, and another, until at last the horses are caught by the lasso. But it is only when they are completely tired that they are caught; therefore it would be impossible for the wolves to catch them unless they used strategy, for the flight of the wolves is not so swift as that of the horses. This is the way the wolves kill the wild horses of the Mexican plains. First, two wolves come out of the woods and begin to play together like two kittens. They gambol about each other and run backward and forward. Then the herd of horses lift their startled heads and get ready to stampede. But the wolves seem to be so playful that the horses, after watching them for a while, forget their fears, and continue to graze. Then the wolves in their play come nearer and nearer, while other wolves slowly and stealthily creep after them. Then suddenly the enemies surround the herd and make one plunge, and the horses are struggling with the fangs of the relentless foes gripped in their throats.

GRINS AND CHUCKLES.

Fuddy—Did you ever notice that successful men are generally bald? Duddy—Certainly! They come out on top.

Husband—What's this stuff? Wife—You told me you wanted a quick lunch, so I made you some hasty pudding.

Mrs. Smith was engaging a new servant, and sat facing the latest applicant. "I hope," said she, "that you had no angry words with your last mistress before leaving." "Oh, dear, no, mum; none whatever," was the reply, with a toss of her head. "While she was having her bath I just locked the bath-room door, took all my things, and went away as quiet as possible."

"Dear me, pa," said the beautiful heiress, "you'll mortify me to death yet." "What's the matter now, Lil?" "You told John to go down to the depot and get the earl's baggage, right out loud, so that he couldn't help hearing you. Why can't you learn to say station and luggage?" "Oh, don't mind that. The earl won't care. He's got used to United States talk. He asked me this morning how I got my dough, and how much I had of it."

When the late Gen. Edward M. McCook lived in Pike's Peak he once presided at a dinner in honor of a famous Indian fighter. Mr. McCook, as he then was, concluded his introduction of the Indian fighter with the words: "I can find but one fault with the colonel's methods. I allude to his well-known custom of enlisting in his regiment only bald-headed men. To aggravate the Indians' feelings so cruelly as that is carrying war too far."

Mr. Swainson is a powerful preacher, but is never above leavening his sermons with humor. A good story he tells concerns a visit once paid to the cottage of one of his parishioners. It was early spring, and for a long time he sat by the window with the woman's little girl. "In looking out," he remarked to the child, "do you notice how bright is the green of the leaves and grass?" The little girl nodded. "Now tell me why does it appear so much brighter at this time," Mr. Swainson asked. "'Cos," was the unexpected reply, "ma's just washed the window and you can see out better."

A Mystery of the Mail

By Paul Braddon.

Do not imagine that I am about to follow the example set me by many writers and indulge in a tirade against talkative women. I don't propose to do anything of the kind.

Dora Thompson was a prattler—a natural gossip, if you will have it so; but she was a pretty, sprightly, intelligent creature, all the same, and was a general favorite in Stonehollow, where her father was postmaster.

Old Tom Thompson, the postmaster, was always laid up with rheumatism, and his wife and daughter performed the labors of his office.

That office was situated in the principal street of the village, with a country hotel for its next-door neighbor, and a barber shop right across the way.

While sitting in the barber's chair one morning, I noticed Dora standing at her father's door, talking to a young man.

The barber was a young German, who possessed "the gift of silence" to such a remarkable degree that he was known as Silent Sam.

As I had been spending a few weeks' vacation with a wealthy friend in the neighborhood, I was acquainted with Sam Myers, and I made bold to ask him carelessly:

"Do you know that young fellow now talking to Miss Thompson?"

"No," was the decided answer.

At the same moment a queer expression passed over the young barber's face.

The barber was in love with the pretty post-mistress, and he was as jealous as fury.

"He's a stranger here?" I ventured to remark, as I watched Sam's face in the glass.

"I believe so," was the only answer I received by word of mouth, but the man's eyes said:

"And I wish he'd make strange here again very soon and sudden."

Without pretending to notice his short remarks, I continued:

"That's a very good-looking fellow talking to her now. I wonder who he is?"

"I mind my own business," replied the barber, and his hand trembled so much that he cut my cheek with the razor.

Commencing with a slight oath, I sprang from the chair as I cried:

"You blamed fool, if you were minding your own business you wouldn't butcher me in that fashion!"

"Served you right," was all he answered.

I was about to let fly at him with my foot, when he dashed the razor on the floor, seized his hat and ran out of the store.

"Come back here and finish your job, barber," I yelled as loud as I could.

The landlord of the hotel soon appeared at the door of his house, and there was a merry smile on his face, as he crossed over to me.

I told the man what had occurred. He burst out laughing.

Then I burst out laughing also, as it was a droll adventure, even if I was the sufferer.

My merriment was not yet hushed when two pistol-shots were heard in the barroom opposite.

"Thunders!" yelled the landlord, rushing out of the shop.

"Sam is playing the mischief."

I darted out after him, forgetting that the lather and the blood were still on my face.

Out from the barroom dashed the young fellow who had been

talking to Dora, and after him rushed the crazy barber, his face streaming with blood, and a smoking revolver in his right hand, as he yelled:

"I'll kill you. I'll murder you!"

Before he could fire again I had knocked the revolver from his hand, and I had the crazy fellow's arms secured behind him.

His rival had darted into the railway depot.

We dragged the crazy barber into the barroom, and then I saw that he had received a severe gash on the forehead.

"Served him right," cried the young man behind the bar. "He kicked up a row with a stranger, and he struck him with a glass."

"Do you know that stranger?" I asked.

"I know him, sir," answered a soft voice behind me. "Mercy! what a fright! Mr. Myers, how could you act so rude?"

The speaker was Dora Thompson, and I was "the fright."

Leaving the crazy barber in the hands of his neighbors, I hastened into the washroom and proceeded to set my face in order.

When I appeared in the barroom again, the barber and Dora had disappeared.

After making a few inquiries, I treated those around me, and then strolled into the post-office, where I found Dora and her mother discussing the shooting affray.

When I gained the street I saw the young stranger walking toward me, and he was holding one hand in his breast, while the other was flourishing a cane.

He entered the barroom, and I was after him.

Looking around, he asked the landlord:

"Where's that crazy barber now?"

"Up in bed, sick. Might as well let up on him, sir."

"I'll blow his brains out if he ever runs foul of me again. He'd be a dead man now if I'd had my shooter with me."

Chris Spencer—as he then called himself—was about as ugly a customer as one could meet in a night's walk in a crowded city.

I was after him then, but he was not aware of the fact.

He was engaged in a desperate and a wicked plot at the time; he was suspected of having committed a horrible crime, and I was to be pitted against him in a desperate struggle.

I saw the barber in his bed that evening, and I had a long talk with him.

He assured me that Dora loved him dearly until Chris Spencer appeared on the scene, and that she had promised to be his wife.

While we were still talking, Dora was ushered into the room. I could soon see that the frivolous girl really liked the barber, but that she was somewhat spoiled by the attentions of the dandy from the city.

The barber was at his shop on the following morning, and so was I.

By altering the position of the mirror, I was enabled to observe the movements of those in the post-office.

Chris Spencer strolled along about eleven o'clock, and he entered the post-office with noiseless steps.

He advanced to the counter with stealthy steps, and glanced over the pile of letters lying there.

Seizing one of them, he thrust it into his breast, then straightened himself up, coughed aloud, and saluted Dora and her mother.

When the mail-thief left the post-office I was on his track, and I was disguised as a regular old tramp.

It is now about time I told what I was after the fellow for.

The friend I was stopping with on the hill above was an old retired sea captain named Richard Dean, and he had an only child, whose name was Maud.

About a month previous, and just ten days after the Fourth

of July, old Captain Dean paid me a visit at the office in New York and asked me to assist him in a mysterious affair.

His daughter, who was a beautiful, intelligent girl of eighteen, was engaged to a young man who was captain of a North River steamboat. His name was John Decker.

The young captain paid Maud a visit at Stonehollow on the Fourth of July, and attended a private picnic with her on the following day.

Dora Thompson and her mother were at that picnic, and they became acquainted with the young captain there.

Chris Spencer was also at the picnic, and it was noticed that he paid particular court to Maud Dean, while he flirted with Dora Thompson as well.

Young Captain Decker was very much annoyed at his lady-love for receiving the stranger's attentions, and a quarrel ensued.

It would have been but a lover's quarrel at most, were it not for the prattlings of Mrs. Thompson and her daughter, who soon reported around the village that Maud had been jilted by her lover.

After that Chris Spencer became a constant visitor at the post-office, and Sam Myers looked on him as a rival.

He continued to visit Maud Dean as well, and the young lady's father, who was a very wealthy man, called on me to make inquiries about the fellow.

Captain Dean said to me:

"What surprises me most is that young Decker hasn't since written to my daughter. He's a sensible young man, and I didn't dream he'd be the one to break off an engagement on account of a silly quarrel."

"What do you wish me to do?" I asked.

"I want you to come up and pay me a visit and see this Spencer. It will be as well also to make some inquiries about him here in town. Here is his picture and his city address."

I started a little when I looked at the photograph, as it bore a very close resemblance to a person whom we had been instructed to look out for, and who was a noted and desperate Chicago confidence man.

When the old captain left me I compared the likenesses, as our chief had one of the Chicago rascal in his possession, and was soon satisfied as to the identity of the two pictures.

Pursuing my inquiries further, I made the acquaintance of young Captain Decker, who informed me that he had written to Maud Dean several times, and that he had not received an answer, on account of which neglect he was highly indignant.

I requested him to write again, and post the letter so that it would be received at Stonehollow at a certain hour.

When I paid a visit to Captain Dean's house, I managed to keep out of the way when Mr. Chris Spencer called there.

I was now following the gentleman to a little grove outside the village, and he had Captain Decker's letter to Maud Dean in his breast-pocket.

Stealing along as quietly as possible, I soon caught sight of my man, who was seated on the trunk of a tree, holding the open letter in his hand, and smoking away as peacefully as if he were at peace with all the world.

"Everything works delightfully," he said to himself, "thanks to the gabby postmistress. It was a bright idea of mine to intercept the letters, or they would make up again. Now she will soon be my wife, and we will be off to Europe together. When we come back here, no one—Hello, you infernal rascal, what were you sneaking there about?"

The last words were addressed to me, as I had just stepped on a rotten branch and had stumbled forward.

Before I could regain my feet the man had me by the collar with one hand and a revolver pointed at my head with the other.

I hesitated to answer, as I was meditating how to act under

the circumstances, and I kept glaring up at him in a trembling manner.

"Speak out, you old rip, or I'll fire," he cried again.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the revolver went off, the ball striking me full on the temple and stunning me on the instant.

When I opened my eyes again, I was alone in the grove where I had fallen.

On searching my pockets I found my revolver and other things all safe. Then I felt convinced that the shooting had been accidental; and that the fellow had hastened away from the grove under the impression that he had killed me.

Taking a roundabout way I got to the barber's shop again, where I resumed my decent appearance, and I then went over to the post-office to inquire for letters.

I did receive a letter at the time, and it was written by Captain Decker.

That night Captain Dean received some visitors on the quiet at his house on the hill, and Chris Spencer was there also.

The rascal was in the parlor with Maud when I was introduced by the old captain.

There was not the least appearance of reproach of conscience on his handsome face as I remarked to Captain Dean:

"I suppose you heard about the murder in the grove, captain?"

"What murder?" asked Maud.

"An old tramp was found dead in the grove this evening with a bullet in his head," I replied, as I kept a side eye on my man.

"I suppose one of his companions killed him," remarked Chris Spencer. "There won't be much fuss made about a fellow like that."

"You are mistaken," I said. "There's quite a fuss over it; and they are after the murderer now. The barber says he knows the murderer."

"The barber! What—the crazy fellow who tried to shoot me?"

"The very same man, Mr. Spencer. He is here now, and he accuses you of the murder."

"Accuses me! The fellow is as crazy as a—a—what nonsense! Captain Dean, you should have that fellow in the asylum, as I said."

"Crazy or not crazy," replied the old captain, "he accuses you of murder, and robbing the mail as well."

"Robbing the mail!"

"Yes, robbing the mail. You have been stealing my daughter's letters from the post-office—and there's one of them now in your breast-pocket, you——"

Before the old captain could finish the sentence the culprit made a dash for the open window.

I was after him, and I caught him by the coat. Wheeling around, he struck me in the face with the barrel of his revolver and knocked me back in the room. He then dashed out of the window.

I sprang up again just as two pistol shots were heard outside.

"I shot him—I shot him!" yelled the barber. "My pistol was loaded this time. I got it in the leg, but I don't mind that."

When we got on the lawn we found Mr. Chris Spencer lying on the path in a dying condition, and the barber and Captain Decker were standing over him. Before he died that night the villain made a full confession.

Maud did not care for the wretch, and she was only too happy at the reconciliation with Captain Decker, whom she soon married.

Dora's father was removed from his position as postmaster, and the family removed to New York City. The crazy barber followed them there, and continued to make love to Dora, who soon became his wife.

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